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by THEODORA DU BOIS

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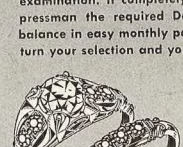

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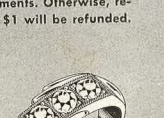

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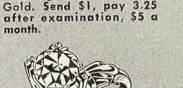

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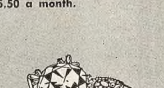

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VOL. 9 JUNE, 1948 No. 5

Book-Length Novel

The Devil's Spoon — **Theodora Du Bois** — 8

What happens when a creature who cannot die takes over the body of a man who cannot live? Here is the exciting story of Haroot the Fallen, who knew everything in heaven, earth or hell—except how to live in today's changing world!

Short Stories

The Shadow and the Flash — **Jack London** — 102

Can the moving out of line of even the smallest atom of the Inscrutable pattern of the Universe, bring down the whole great edifice in instantaneous, crashing holocaust?

Eemanu Grows Up — **Leslie A. Croutch** — 112

Man—the all knowing, all powerful—wasn't the first to walk this earth . . . nor will he be the last. . . .

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Herbert George Wells—"World Brain."

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Cover by Finlay. Inside illustrations by Lawrence, Finlay, and McNutt.

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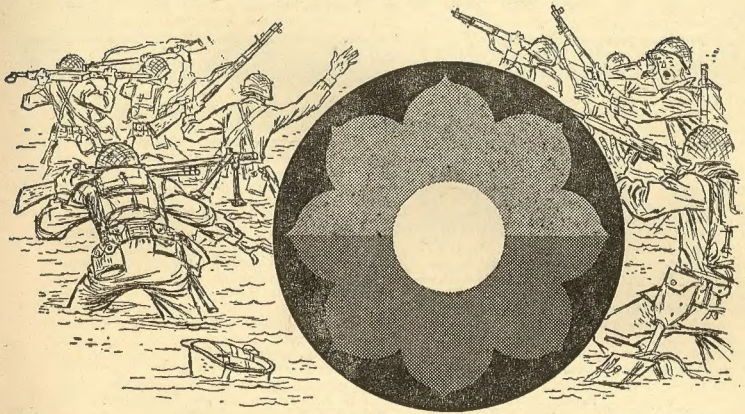
Only real men can wear it



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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

"PEACEMAKER ABSORBING"

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed "The Peacemaker" thoroughly. The writing reminded me of "The Ark of Fire", though it was definitely lacking in the fine characterization of the latter. I shall never forget the fast action, the suspenseful, and soul-stirring story of John Hawkins. "The Peacemaker" was better written, though. The constant quarreling of the Pethwicks, the strong determination of Dr. Pethwick in carrying out his plan, and the latter's conception of the Lordly Ones, and his comparison of the operation of the motor vehicle to that of scientific apparatus, all combined to make it one of the most absorbing stories I've ever read. Thanks to C. S. Forester for some very unusual writing.

Now to the Readers' Viewpoint. Glad you liked my comments on "People of the Ruins", Mr. Auger. I'll tell you why I liked "Island of Captain Sparrow". It was darn good. That's why I agree with you putting "Allan and the Ice-Gods" in class B and "People of the Ruins" in class A but I'll take "Third Person Singular" over your "Prisoner of Time".

I don't agree with Chad Oliver's statement that "City of Wonder" rates several notches above such stories as "People of the Ruins" and "Unthinkable". The former was a disappointment, yet good.

Now to Stirling Macoboy. I didn't like your criticism. "People of the Ruins" you said, was a well-written example of a very much hackneyed plot. This, in my opinion, isn't so. The Shanks novel had sketches of genius throughout.

I agree with Thos. H. Casidy about "Unthinkable". I liked the tale. Rattray is a character that will forever live in my mind. The two best characterizations, in my opinion, are Jeremy and the old speaker in "People of the Ruins".

JAMES W. AYERS.

609 1st St.,
Attalla, Alabama.

"THE PEACEMAKER" ISSUE

The past few issues of F.F.M. have been refreshing in theme, especially "Minimum Man" and "The Peacemaker".

I enjoyed the latter from beginning to end and was well satisfied with the over-all effect.

The Finlay cover was an improvement over the last one, but nothing compared to Finlay's prewar standard.

I was glad to see the interiors done exclusively by my favorite artist, Lawrence. He's done better, but they were still excellent. Page 57 takes top honors. It is one of the best he's done for your pages, or any other magazine's, for that matter.

The stories "Planet of Sand" and "Lonesome Place" were both well done, especially the latter. Derleth is one of the better contemporaries at this kind of material.

The Readers' Viewpoint is one of the best letter sections currently printed.

I wonder if I could take this opportunity to do a little announcing that might be of interest to many of your readers. This message is especially aimed at your newer readers. It seems that a club, Young Fandom by name, is in its embryonic stages right now, and could use some new members. Young Fandom is principally for the younger, teen age or early twenties fan, who has not as yet carved his name in the walls of fandom, but is anxious to get going. Previously, newer fans had to blunder around for a few years before doing anything. YF hopes to remedy this situation. By getting all the young fans into a group, we hope to help the new fans get started right away. Most of the better known letter writers, such as Tom Jewitt, Lin Carter, Rick Sneary, Guerry Brown, and many others are the members and officers. And a finer bunch of fellows would be hard to find. So come on in, you guys that are waiting to get started. Write to me and learn more about this interesting new club.

JACK CLEMENTS.

5618 Whitney Pl.,
Cincinnati 27, Ohio.

THANKS FOR F.N.

I received some swell presents for Christmas but none of them afforded me as much enjoyment as the news of the revival of *Fantastic Novels*, F.F.M.'s sister magazine. When I also learned that you would reprint the Munsey Classics which I had despaired of ever reading, my joy was complete.

I am glad to see that your first story was Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar".

I'm sure everyone will be most desirous of reading the two subsequent "Polaris" stories, and "The Second Deluge". Also by all means print Merritt's "Seven Footprints to Satan" to complete your publication of his novels.

I will close with my sincerest wishes for the success of *Fantastic Novels* and grateful thanks for bringing us the best in Fantasy and Science-fiction.

JAMES M. PERRIN.

381-3 East 151 St.,
Bronx 55, New York.

Editor's Note: All of the stories you mention will be published soon.

(Continued on page 111)

A SOLID HIT WITH MEN EVERYWHERE

THE MAY ISSUE OF ARGOSY!

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BOARD OF JUDGES—

The Argosy-Dodger board of judges is composed of William O'Dwyer, Mayor of New York City; John Kieran, veteran sports writer and star of "Information Please"; William J. Klem, Supervisor of Umpires, National League; Red Barber, Sports Director of Columbia Broadcasting System; Branch Rickey, President of Brooklyn National League Baseball Club; Rogers Terrill, Managing Editor of Argosy Magazine; and George Sisler, Hall of Fame, Cooperstown, N. Y.

AND THESE OTHER FEATURES...

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER...

A Daring Exposé of the Most Sensational Murder Trial of Our Times; A Timely Sportsman's Almanac article on fishing; The "Great Armored Car Robbery"; and "Las Vegas, Bargain Basement Monte Carlo."

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Haroot was astride the galloping winds, and the stars were running with torches past him. . . .

THE DEVIL'S SPOON

By Theodora Du Bois

CHAPTER I

SOMETHING was squeezing Haroot's back violently and rhythmically below his shoulder blades. The pressure made him want to grunt as the pigs used to grunt behind the basket-maker's wife's house in Cairo. But he refrained from grunting because it would not be polite in such a crowd.

There must be a crowd, he realized, because he saw, through the side of his eye, a great many feet—men's feet in thick rubber-soled shoes and slim women's feet mostly in white or alligator-skinned affairs with the high heels that he detested. One woman, though, had on black and white sport shoes. They looked as if they might belong to Sally. And the legs rising from the shoes looked as if they might be hers, smart and attractive but in no way silly, though they did seem rather tense. In

What happens when a creature who cannot die takes over the body of a man who cannot live? Here is the exciting story of Haroot the Fallen, who knew everything in heaven, earth or hell—except how to live in today's changing world!

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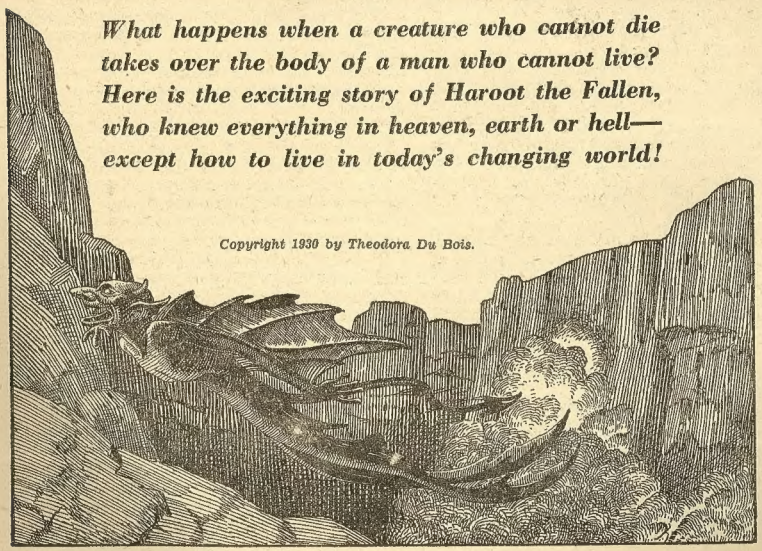

fact, all the legs rising above him had a tense appearance. And the pressure on his back was continuing and some one chanted, "One two three four *five!* One two three four *five,*" squash, below the shoulder blades.

He seemed to be lying flat on a wharf or something and a small dead fish was unpleasantly near his nose. They should have been more careful where they put him down. One of his elbows was in quite a pool of oil, and he had on such a nice white jersey, soaking wet though, now. He was soaking wet all over and felt like a thoroughly submerged sponge, so uncomfortable that he did not even try to disentangle the murmur that went on above him. He did not try to get the words, but a sense of dread and chilling horror surrounded him like a fog. Then a bubble of water seemed to catch in his throat and he coughed and some one shouted:

"He's coming out of it," exultantly, and the still, tense legs about him shifted and relaxed as the fog of horror drifted away.

He felt a sense of pleased gratification that he was causing so much interest—quite the center of attraction—and he coughed again slightly, although this time it was not necessary at all.

Then a small boy's voice shouted, "Mr. Bingham's drowned. His mast fell over and knocked him overboard!" and some one hailed some one else as "Doctor," and a pair of short, fat legs in blue serge hurried into his range of vision, and excitement whirled again and splashed over him in breaking waves of explanation and ejaculation. Then Haroot was sat up limply, like a doll, while somebody supported him under the arms.

"I'm all right; let me stand up," he said, and was surprised at the peevish sound of his voice. He had not meant to be peevish, but he felt very odd and ill and misty still, and people did things to him—shoved him and hauled him and wrapped a blanket about him, which was pleasant because his teeth were beginning to chatter in the cold wind.

Then he was bundled into a waiting car, and as he was tucked back in its corner he saw Sally—she was his wife now, wasn't she?—sliding into the seat at the wheel. He caught her eye and was horrified at what he saw there. There was no rapture, no wild relief at his having been dragged back from the very jaws of death. Distressingly he had caught the flash of a naked sword between them. . . . He felt that he had got himself into a horrible mess.

When he woke the next morning he was not so depressed, however. It was a beautiful day, and he always responded to the condition of the weather. Also his room was charming—low ceilinged with buff-colored walls on which hung old maps and prints of sea pictures. The furniture had evidently been inherited from some ancestor of wealth and understanding, an ancestor who had the good sense to equip his house with the best Early American maple highboys and chests of drawers and ladder-backed chairs. A bowl of sweet-peas sat on a Chippendale table by his bedside, and Haroot sniffed delightedly, for he had a fondness for sweet-peas. Also other agreeable smells hovered faintly about him, a hint of coffee and bacon from some remote region, and surely there joined those amiable odors the promise of corn muffins, warm and golden brown.

His mouth watered, and he wondered about the hour of breakfast. He heard children's voices muted through the door and distant hallways. Swift steps passed outside his own door, and at any minute he expected it to open. But it did not open, and a voice, Sally's, said, "Petra, I'd put the blue linen suits on the boys this morning. Those that they had on yesterday afternoon are clean enough. And Alice-Anne had better wear her smocked pink dress that Aunt Anne gave her."

"How delightful," Haroot thought. "Small girls should always wear smocked dresses, preferably pink." He hoped that Alice-Anne—he must not forget that she was now his daughter—would have curly hair.

He put his hand up to feel his own hair—it would be unpleasant if that were curly—and found, to his surprise, that his head was bandaged. Benjamin Bingham must have been hit a bad crack when the mast went over. He wondered how he looked in the bandage, whether it were very unbecoming, and he sat up to discover if he could see in the mirror over the chest of drawers. It was a beautiful old mirror with a picture painted on the glass at the top, a picture of a small church and three pine-trees and snowy fields and a road with a sleigh on it.

He could see all that clearly, but he could not catch the least glimpse of himself, except the extreme top of his bandaged head. That was annoying, and it

made him feel giddy and ill to sit up. But he was filled with the most intense desire to know what he looked like. He noticed suddenly that he was wearing lavender-striped pajamas of silk, very blatant and vivid, and those caused him dismay, for lavender garments he despised. If Benjy Bingham were that sort of man—and he was now Benjy Bingham—

SOMETHING like terror gripped him. He must see himself—he must. He lay back on his pillows trying to be calm. It was a calming room. Outside the open windows the leaves of maple trees stirred and rustled. A quiet wind fingered green silk curtains at the window's edge. The sound of crickets came to him and then again the sound of children's laughing voices. But he himself was afire with the necessity to look in that mirror.

Then for the first time he became aware of his bed. It was a nice bed, an expensive bed, presumably a copy of an old one, maple, with four low fluted posts capped by small carved pineapples. It was without reproach, certainly, but there was only one of it. No twin stood beside it, and it was the sort of bed that always has a twin. Unquestionably it was the only bed in the room, unquestionably then Sally, his wife, slept elsewhere.

"I should have looked before I leaped," he thought unhappily. "I should have looked into the whole situation more carefully before I undertook it at all."

Now, lying in Benjamin Bingham's comfortable bed between cool linen sheets and covered by a soft white woolly blanket, Haroot was appalled at the carefree, inconsequential manner in which he had entered upon his adventure. But it had not seemed such a difficult or even unusual adventure at the time. As a matter of fact he had done the same thing once before and accomplished it successfully. And this time when his master had ordered him up to earth, he had been simply overjoyed. And it had all been very easy, really.

He had unostentatiously slipped into Benjy Bingham's body at the moment when Benjy's soul was leaving it, when Benjy, in fact, was drowning. And Benjy's spirit had gone on serenely, and Haroot's—in Benjy's damp and soggy body—had been, by means of artificial respiration, dragged back to life. So far it had been easy, but the future loomed full of complications.

Haroot was a spirit living in a strange body, like a person inhabiting an absolutely unknown house. He didn't know the first thing about it, the mental furniture it was equipped with or the friends who frequented it. For a moment he felt a sense of panic. Could he ever be at home in this alien house?

There was a sound outside of his door. It opened, and a crisp white-garmented nurse entered the room.

"Good morning, Mr. Bingham," she said. "Isn't this a beautiful bright day!"

"Beautiful," he said, for it would have been perjury not to; but he felt grumpy, and he wished that somebody had found him an older nurse. This one was too pretty and too young. "May I have a mirror?" he said. "I'd like to look at this cursed bandage."

"Surely," she said. She had a Southern roll to her voice, and she smoothed the bandage on his head very gently. "I'm going down to get your breakfast, Honey. Now, you have a nice little rest and you'll have a perfectly splendid appetite."

She went out, completely forgetting the mirror, and he sighed and relaxed among his pillows. "Now, she will begin to like me too well," he thought, "and it'll be another complication." Still, he needn't worry about that yet. He lay quietly, watching the sunlight and shadows on the leaves of the maple trees outside the window. Now, the children's voices came from somewhere beneath him, and one of them was singing, *"Sur le Pont d'Avignon,"* very sweetly but very much off key.

Then again his door opened and there appeared the nurse with his tray of breakfast, and she was right—he did have a perfectly splendid appetite. The food was delicious, and he liked the gay Brittany ware on a heavy Italian linen tray-cover. He had sliced peaches, smothered in cream, and oatmeal and bacon and coffee and the delectable muffins of gold corn bread. The only trouble was that the nurse would not get him second helpings of anything. He was feeling quite annoyed at her tyranny, when Sally came in.

"Feeling better, Benjy?" she said. But to his regret she regarded him only as she would an ailing acquaintance, with courteous appraisal, impersonal and cool. And she scarcely listened when he said he was better but his head ached infernally. She said, absent-mindedly, "It naturally would, I suppose," and then turned to the nurse and said, "What should he have for lunch, Miss Beals?"

"I've made out a nourishment chart. I'll show you," Miss Beals answered. "He must not be allowed to overeat. I notice a tendency—"

"Yes," said Sally, "there is."

Haroot was indignant. "I certainly have not a tendency toward overeating," he said. "I eat too little, if anything." But the women paid no attention to him, and Miss Beals disappeared from the room for the nourishment chart, and Sally pulled the shade down at the window to just the wrong spot. He wished that she would speak to him. He loved the sound of her voice. It was low-pitched, charming. He must say something to make her speak.

"Beautiful day, isn't it?" he said. "I—er—that was quite a nasty knock when the mast went over. It must have hurt that poor chap awfully."

"What poor chap?"

"Why, Benjy Bingham!"

Alarm crept into her face, and he cursed himself for his clumsiness.

"I'm a bit foggy still," he said. "It was a close call. Death now, it's a queer thing. I suppose that most mortals are afraid of it, but when you come close to it you realize that it's just gates opening, and Azrael, of course, to see you through."

"Azrael?"

She was watching him closely.

"The angel of death, you know."

"Oh, yes. Benjy, my dear, do you feel feverish?"

Even when she said, "my dear," there was no real warmth to it. It was as if whatever flame was in her died down in his presence, as if he were a chill wind, dampening it. It made him feel very badly, and he was aware that he was making total hash of the conversation, just when he was so anxious to appear at his best.

"Perhaps I am a little feverish," he said, weakly. "I feel absolutely rotten. An experience like that sets you thinking."

"Well, don't think too hard, Benjy. It's apt to be serious when you get it for the first time at your age. Like measles." There was a lightness in her voice and yet it stung him.

APPARENTLY, then, Benjamin Bingham had never indulged in thought. How unpleasant. How could Haroot maintain the rôle of that sort of person? Mountainous difficulties loomed before him, and the nurse came back with the nourishment chart and she and Sally withdrew into the secret recesses of an adjoining room.

They had taken the tray and he lay quiet. There was whispering in the hall, and looking up he saw three children peering anxiously in the doorway, two small boys and a taller girl. The boys were dark, husky little youngsters in blue linen suits and the girl did have a pink smocked dress, and curly hair, cream-color and enchanting.

"Oh, hello," he said, delighted. "Come on in and see a fellow."

They hung back shyly, alarmed at the bandage about his head.

"We can't come in," the small girl said in a voice just above a whisper. "Mother said you were feverish and that nurse said we mustn't disturb you. Do you feel very sick, Father?"

He felt a distinct thrill at the word, "Father," and said, "Oh, no, not very sick."

"Did the mast hit you hard?" one of the boys asked.

"Quite a whack." He smiled at them and they smiled back, solemnly. Whatever the barrier there might be between himself and Sally, there would be no trouble with the children, he felt sure. The boys were such nice solid little chaps, inclined to be friendly, and so pleasantly sunburned, with such sturdy legs. The girl looked like a small celestial being, only stronger. Absurd not to know what his own children's names were. But more absurd not to know what one's own face looked like. Perhaps they could get him a mirror.

"Look here," he said, "could you get hold of a mirror for me?"

Before they could answer, the nurse had come in and shooed them from the door.

Then followed the long ceremony of the bath and the making of the bed, all performed most deftly and precisely. It was astonishing, Haroot thought, how a young woman who looked so much like a young kitten dressed in severe white nursing costume, could be so efficient and so experienced in life.

She chattered constantly through the process of activities, telling him a rather gruesome, but exciting experience she had had with her last patient, who had been a "real sweet gentleman, but peculiar. He took fancies and he'd been hit on the head too, wasn't it funny. But a big picture'd fallen down off the wall and hit him and he'd never been right since. Still he was real nice, and I knew he didn't mean it that night he went after me with a knife.

Now, Honey, you put your arms in there."

She was putting upon him green-striped pajamas which he loathed. He hated even his arms and shoulders as he looked at them, but he was so tired by the bath and his amusement over the tale of the sweet but peculiar gentleman, that he had no energy to protest about the pajamas or curiosity to ask for a mirror and see what his face was like. He lay back against his pillows, enjoying the sensation of freshly ironed garments. Miss Beals, saying, "Shut yo' eyes now, Honey," went quietly from the room and closed the door. He drowsed and thought idly of that which had happened to bring him to inhabiting the body of Benjamin Bingham. It had all started, he realized, one evening about a month ago, when he was still a disembodied spirit, at least a spirit without a conventional body of tangible flesh and blood.

CHAPTER II

HE, HAROOT, hanging by his heels in a rocky pit somewhere in the environs of Babel, had been very tired indeed. He had swayed himself gently, letting his head and arms hang limp and free. Below him, jagged rocks of the cliff-sides narrowed into depths of darkness, gray, merging into black and purple depths, with a damp chill smell arising, coiling itself about him like the phantom of some evil snake. With a rush and squeak, two black and bat-winged demons playing tag brushed past his ear and dived into the chasm below him, then screaming they tore upward, and he craned his head and saw them vanish into a bit of pale blue sky between the silvered moon and one cool star.

Once Haroot had been an angel, lighting the lamps of Heaven. He sighed at the memory and swung a little back and forth in his chains. He had had burnished wings that matched his copper-colored hair, and he had had a halo. The martyrs, that is the feminine martyrs, and even some of the more frivolous feminine saints, had gazed demurely at the golden pavements when he passed, but he had been aware that they had looked at him admiringly through the corners of their eyes. And he had been proud, too proud.

He had deserved to have it taken out of him, to be sent to earth to learn compassion and humility. How he remembered the black palms against the sunset and the desert in waves of lavender before his feet! And the sweetness of that sin for which he was to suffer throughout eternity. He had been too clever, and too proud.

Now, he hung by his heels in a pit in Hades and taught miserable young sheytans and djinns and ghouls the elements of magic. He knew more magic than anyone else in Heaven or earth or hell. But that was little satisfaction. His ankles ached, and his neck had a crick in it. Although he was not exactly tangible he had the illusion of a body, in fact, quite a beautiful one, rather like quartz in appearance; and since he had the illusion of a body he had also the illusion of pain, really quite intolerable pain.

And dusk was drawing about him with its ache of loneliness, its memories of lanterns flickering down shadowy streets—lost splendor, lost happiness and a future that held nothing but hanging by his heels in hell. He swayed his body to and fro. It was his only way of getting exercise, and he had to have exercise, particularly over week-ends. He was curving back and up and back and up till he swung faster and faster. As he swung he shouted poetry, bits of the Rubaiyat, till it echoed in hollow answer from the deep black throat of the pit beneath him:

"Up from earth's center through the seventh gate
I rose and on the throne of Saturn sate,
And many a knot unraveled by the road
But not the master knot of human fate."

He swung faster and higher, shouting louder. He could almost touch the walls of the pit with his fingers. Sometimes, by stretching every cord and muscle in his body he was able to scrape two fingers of his right hand against the rocks. That was his game and that the goal he strove for. If he touched the rock he won; if he failed, the game was lost. Surprising how much excitement he got out of it, by making bets with himself and setting up gorgeous imaginary prizes. Yesterday he had lost, but today he hoped to win. If he won—his body was arched upward like a bow and the swoop down caught the breath out of him—if he won today he had offered himself a large gold flagon with two handles.

But the rock was still beyond his reach.

He made a supreme effort, swinging till he was dizzy, till he felt that he must whirl up and about in a circle. He could almost touch the walls now. He did! He felt the rough scrape of stone against his finger-tips and exulted. He had touched the rock, and won.

Suddenly as he swung more slowly, hanging limp and breathless, winds were all about him, blowing down upon him, whistling up out of the pit, tossing his hair.

"You've been sent for," a voice said below him, and he looked down and saw one of the minor fiends squatting in the shadows of a ledge. The creature had a large head, like a cat's on a frog's body, and although not a bad-hearted thing, was one for whom Haroot had always felt an aversion. Now, it grinned up at him broadly, as Haroot asked:

"Who's sent for me? What do you mean?"

"Iblees," the creature said.

"Iblees!" And for a second of ecstasy Haroot had hoped that his summons had come from The Highest himself. Fool, to have presumed so. But he must not let himself be frightened. If he must face Iblees he must face him without fear. Fear would give his very soul to Iblees' power, and his soul at least must be kept clean.

"What does he want me for?" he asked the fiend, and it wagged its head and said:

"I wouldn't be in your shoes."

Then the winds began again and Haroot heard the mingled voices of any number of sheytans saying, "Hurry up now, loosen the chains there; don't drop him, idiot," and his feet were wrenched suddenly free, and something caught him below the armpits, whirling him upwards. He was astride the galloping winds, his hair blown backward, and the stars were running with torches past him across the cloud-swept sky.

THE winds brought him to a cavern in the green chrysolite mountains of Kaf, to the halls of Iblees. He was stiff, Haroot was, from hanging in the pit, and chilled from his ride across the heavens. He rubbed his hands together, trying to warm them, and wished that he had had time to put on his flame-colored tunic to do honor to Iblees. Naked, one is not at one's best, and he was anxious to make a good impression. He kept reassuring himself by thinking, "It's not the clothes, it's the man," and "Handsome is as handsome does," but it didn't allay his uneasiness. He knew that Satan was influenced by appearances.

He'd been long enough on earth to realize that the well-dressed people, or at least the ones with a certain amount of personal charm and attractiveness, are the only ones that Satan cares a snap about. Therefore he stood in his shadowy corner and wished desperately for his flame-colored tunic. It had an embroidered border of peacocks and palm leaves, and he kept it rolled up in a cranny of the rocks of his pit, just where he could reach it with a hooked stick. It had been a pleasure to fish for it and look at it sometimes. He didn't see how he could have come to forget it.

Every one else in the hall was wearing tunics. He would feel a fool kneeling up there, naked before Iblees, with that diabolical grin like a lash scorching his bent head and bare shoulders. He wished he were out of the place anyway.

It was a room of unpleasant memories, for it was here he had been sentenced to hang by his heels in the pit. He had thought the sentence was for eternity, but evidently Iblees had changed his mind and had something else in store for him. He shivered a bit, trying not to dread some new punishment. One who had lighted the lamps of Heaven must have no fear.

Before him Iblees sat on his throne, talking with his five sons who were grouped about him. Tall, dark creatures they were, and Iblees above them, scowling and swathed in his purple robe, was enough to send shudders down the back of Michael himself. It was Solomon's old throne that Iblees was sitting on, made of ivory, overlaid with the best gold, six steps above the floor of the cavern, and there were two lions, of stone, facing each other very haughtily at either side of the steps, but the right eye of one had been battered and the tail of the other was gone. The other twenty-two stone lions of Solomon's had been lost.

Behind the throne, around the walls of the cavern, was a long piece of cloth of linen yarn, woven, and with pictures on it done in the Egyptian manner in reds and greens and blues. The pictures were of Solomon going after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites, and of Solomon building an altar to Moloch, too.

It was difficult for Haroot to see quite

all the pictures because the light in the hall was rather bad. The roof of the cavern arched up into darkness, and hanging there and here were luminous green moons. And there were tall tripods with marble bowls having within them fires. They were like great opals hollowed, for you could see the fire through the sides of the marble. Sometimes they burned clear, in low, bright embers, and sometimes they flamed high, and sometimes a small furry, horned fiend would come about and, on tiptoe, throw on incense. Then clouds of smoke would eddy out and float, and drift away.

Then, to his intense embarrassment, Haroot heard his name called loudly, and some one pushed him and, still wishing for his tunic, he went forward and kneeled before Iblees' throne.

"Get up," Iblees said. "You can sit on the lion's back. I want to talk to you. No, the left-hand lion."

For a second Haroot hesitated, wondering how he could tell which was the left-handed lion, then when Iblees pointed impatiently, he climbed on the beast's cold back.

"You summoned me, sire?" he said.

"Yes. I want you to go to earth on a mission for me."

Haroot's brain whirled with joy, and he clutched his fingers into a stone curl of the lion's mane.

"Yes, sire," he said, "I should be delighted."

"Well, I'm not doing it for your special delight, but because you happen to have more knowledge of magic than any one I know of, and a certain knack of teaching—"

"Sire, I do hope that I won't have to teach magic on earth," Haroot interrupted in consternation.

"Will you kindly listen and not interrupt?" Iblees was angry. "What I was about to say was—what, oh, yes—I am sending you for reasons of my own. And as to the method, I think the way you can work most efficiently is to go up there and slip into some one's body when he's not aware of it. You could manage it, I think, at one of those revival meetings. Pick out some man and when he is in a religious frenzy—"

"If you don't mind," Haroot said, "I'd rather choose another type of person to slip into. The really best people nowadays don't go in for revivals at all. I mean the best people—"

"You mean 'the smart people'?"

"Yes, sire, that's right—that's what the papers call them. I know because one of the fiends has a friend at a magazine stand in one of the subway stations and he, I mean the fiend, brings me odd papers and magazines now and then. Of course, it's hard reading upside down, but—"

"That's enough about your magazines. Go back to the subject."

"Well, all that I was saying is that the best people on earth aren't going in any more for religion. They go out for golf and that sort of thing instead."

"But there's no frenzy to golf," Iblees objected.

"Oh, I don't know. I think they get sort of a blind ecstasy out of it. I've always imagined that Pan originated golf—hit around a chestnut burr with a crooked stick, and some young satyr was a caddy. Certainly they offer up prayers mentioning the name of the Deity frequently—"

"Inverted prayers." Haroot and the sons of Iblees laughed, and a murmur of amusement rippled through the cavern. "But that's neither here nor there," Iblees said. "What I want to know is why do you have to incarnate yourself in one of the best people?"

"I thought, sire, that you wanted me to go where I could serve you best."

"All right—all right then. I quite see your point. You go on up there then and establish yourself in some mortal's body."

"Any body I want?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And my orders, sire?"

"Your orders, curse you, I'll send to you there when the time comes. Do you know, Haroot, you are deucedly annoying. You're so eager with your own ideas you'll never listen to any one else's."

"I'm sorry, sire." Haroot bent his head, humbly. "I know it is a failing. I've tried to get over it."

"Well, you'd better try harder or you'll find yourself hanging by your heels again in hell. Go on up to earth. Get into some person's body, spend a little time adjusting yourself to your new environment, look over the ground and draw your own conclusions about conditions, and then I'll send your orders. My sons will keep in more or less touch with you. They have several offices up in the city."

"SHALL I be able to get in touch with you, personally, if it should seem necessary?" Haroot asked.

"Probably. I go there frequently. You'd be apt to find me in any roadhouse after dark."

"And how about—what I mean to say is —how about the woman problem?"

"The woman problem?" Iblees was puzzled.

"What I mean is, when I slip into some one else's body—I'll choose a man, of course—"

"Well, I don't know—" One of Iblees' sons interrupted Haroot. "You might be able to do far more efficient work for father as a woman."

"More subtle," one of the other sons said.

"I couldn't." Haroot was decided. "I could not go their high heels. My heels are sensitive—like Achilles'."

"Well, stop talking about your heels and get to the point." Again Iblees was impatient. "What about the woman problem?"

"What I want to know is, am I bound by any vows of celibacy and poverty and things of that kind? When I went to earth the last time—that is, when they sent me down from Heaven—there was a great deal of ceremony to it.

"In the first place I had to slip into the body of a poor man. They're keen about the poor, in Heaven. There was a whole corps of scribes looking up people who would be suitable for me, and finally they chose a fig-seller. He was supposed to have all the virtues there were—humility and poverty and celibacy and all that. But when I was irrevocably in him, I discovered that they hadn't found out the half of it. He was—well—the situations I found myself in! There was a woman, a basket-maker's wife—they lived in a mud hut on the banks of the Nile. She said to me one evening—we'd locked out her husband—at least the woman had—and she said to me—"

"We are not amused," Iblees said, with cold dignity. "Kindly omit the reminiscence."

"Sorry," Haroot said, and flushed a bright pink all over his body. He looked, for the moment, like a figure of rose quartz astride a green jade lion. "What I was about to say, was—"

"You wanted to know something about the woman problem. What was it?"

"Well, of course, there are a great many things I want to know about the woman problem."

"Go!" Iblees roared. "Don't sit there talking any longer. You've got a tongue like an old woman's. It's hitched in the middle."

"No, sire," Haroot answered. "It's merely that you stimulate me so. I keep thinking of things to say. I'm not naturally garrulous."

Laughter followed that remark and Iblees snorted, "Go along, get off at once. 'Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today'"

"Exactly," Haroot murmured as he slipped off the lion's back. "'A stitch in time saves nine.'" He was thinking of a bad rip in his flame-colored tunic that would have to be mended before he went to earth. "Thank you, Your Majesty." He bowed low, again the whirlwind caught him and swept him away.

Dawn found him on a ledge of rock in his pit stitching his flame-colored tunic. The place was full of ledges and holes and crannies where the young fiends and imps and djinns and ghouls and sheytans had perched while he taught them magic. Unutterable joy to think that he need never again supervise their wrigglings, their whisperings, their nervous titterings, their shoving each other off ledges, their howls of rage and pain. Never again need he try to teach anybody anything. Never again would black weariness and depression creep about him like a coiling serpent from the pit.

His tunic was almost mended. He would go up to earth and look about a bit, look over the Social Registers to find a suitable person, a really suitable person this time, no one like the fig-seller. That mistake had happened because of the innocence of the Heavenly scribes who hadn't known what to look for in a person's records. You have to have some knowledge of evil to recognize the signs of it. This time Haroot would choose a really decent chap, some one of good background, and pleasant personality and surrounding.

After all, Iblees had never answered his question as to the woman problem. Well, he would choose a married man, a young one. Iblees had not forbidden it. A young one with small children. Haroot was very fond of children, indeed. He would choose a man who was good at some sport and who had plenty of money. Haroot had no desire to be burdened by anxiety about bills and things of that sort when he had his hands full of Iblees' business.

Last time, when he was the fig-seller, he

had been in a constant state of perturbation over every fig that turned bad, or that the cat got hold of, or that fell off his tray. His existence was ruined by the necessity of playing nurse-maid to a lot of fat, unresponsive figs. And he had felt his humble position keenly. Of course, it had been in the nature of a punishment, and as such he had accepted it without question. But it hadn't worked, the punishment. Here he was just as far from being humble as he ever had been. He was appalled at himself when he thought of how he had talked to Iblees. He would never have talked like that to The Highest. No. Whenever he had come before that throne he had ground his forehead in the dust—but of course there wasn't any dust —all golden pavements there.

Most bitter longing engulfed him for the serenity, the ecstasy, the perfection of the golden courts of Heaven. Once he had lighted the lamps there. Once he had had burnished wings and a halo. Now he was a emissary of the arch-enemy. His conscience wrung him and for a second he contemplated rushing up to Heaven, flinging himself before the throne and begging to be hung by the heels in a pit forever, to work out his punishment, if only he might again feel the favor of The Highest. Life was worth nothing without it.

But he turned his thoughts away from such contemplation. He was an emissary of Iblees, a situation, he realized, of more than little danger. "He who sups with the devil must use a long spoon"—but the devil spreads his table. So it is impossible for one to choose one's own length spoon. But even so, by keeping his wits about him, he could manage himself and Iblees too, and have a thoroughly good time of it. He would put his past behind him, go up to earth and slip into some one's body. He would choose a man who had a house with a fine modern frigidaire in it. Having spent so long in the lower regions, ice was something greatly to be desired. Ice, in a tinkling glass!

The tunic was finished. He stood up and slipped it on. It hung to just above the knees, and he looked at it admiringly. It was becoming to him. The border of peacocks and palm leaves was beautifully embroidered. The basket-maker's wife had done it for him. It was time for him to go to earth. And he must go first to Azrael, the angel of death, for some lists of people who were to be summoned shortly. It was really a very simple thing to do.

And there was a great deal of precedent for it, it was done far oftener than people realize—all those cases of amnesia, for instance. But usually the invading spirit handled the matter unskillfully. Haroot had no desire to land in the psychopathic ward of some unsympathetic hospital, and he was quite confident that he could pull his own experiment off with all success. But there was one angle of it that troubled him. In the Bible all such episodes were referred to as possession by an "unclean spirit," or the devil. And while Haroot might technically now be classed as a devil, being sent direct from hell, still he *had* once been one of the Heavenly beings and retained those celestial qualities within him, unimpaired. And also, whatever his faults, he was not in any sense unclean, nor would he in any way harm or torment the body he was to inhabit; rather he would bring it a new lease of life and give it a really good time.

In considering the situation he felt that even if he should chance to meet any Son of The Highest he would not be ordered out of his new body and cast into a herd of swine. In no way was he like those devils whose name was Legion. He was thoroughly decent and kindly and—well, one must admit it—rather good-looking. Surely even a Son of The Highest would realize that he was of finer mettle than the general run of devils. At any rate there was no use worrying. He had received his orders and must start out for earth at once.

HE WENT to the city and there, for a week or two, although invisible to humans, had a glorious time simply enjoying himself. He allied himself with a group of young djinns, and while he felt they were hardly the creatures to be seen with constantly, for they were a bit low grade and had none of the virtues that he had as having been a Heavenly creature, still they were amusing enough companions for a time. They used to whirl up and down Broadway at night and stand on the high signs flashing red and blue and golden letters. Then, whooping, they would dive down and land on their feet in the seething streets, hook their arms about the waist of some chorus beauty, and parade, all in a row, singing through the crowd.

He went to the theaters, too, and en-

joyed them immensely, and there he often found a horde of creatures in Iblees' employ. And sometimes he ran across a group of celestial beings, none that he knew well, or with whom he had more than a bowing acquaintance, and he was rather surprised to see them at a play at all. But these always went home immediately after the performance, sometimes even hurrying out before the last act was quite finished; whereas Haroot and the djinns would stay until the last gasp and then go around to some night club and discuss what they had seen and dance until the morning. It was gorgeous fun.

But after a few weeks of such dissipation he began to think it was time to do something about choosing the body he was to inhabit. He had received from Azrael the lists of those to be summoned and had gone over them carefully, but as they were little more than names and addresses, he felt that he might almost as well have read over a telephone book, for all the good it did him. Then he took to going about among the crowds, looking, himself, for people on the list.

Most of them were marked, deep in the eyes, but few of them knew it. It was rather ghastly, searching them out. There was one girl with charming fair hair and a blue sport suit and felt hat. He was sitting unseen astride one of the lions of the Library, watching the crowds, when he saw her coming up the Avenue, and she walked as if her blood beat to a tune of triumph. Then he saw her eyes and read there what Azrael had written.

He was terribly sorry for her—she was so enjoying living—and for a moment he was tempted to reconsider his decision about not, under any circumstances, becoming a woman. Moreover, she wore reasonable heels, but she had long, upswept hair, and he could never in the world bother with it every morning. Later he realized he could easily, had he become that young woman, have had her long hair cut. But by that time she had been in a motor accident, and Azrael had come for her, and it was too late.

Then he began to look for a suitable person in the subways, much to his discouragement. There was no one in the subways he was willing to be at all. They were all infinitely worse than the fig-seller in Cairo. They chewed gum, and he would not tolerate the thought of being in a body that chewed gum. Besides that, they all looked so depressed and sleepy; they seemed to have a gray film or pallor over them; they studied the advertisements so dully. They were clay vessels lighted with sullen, scarcely flickering fires. Haroot, in his vivid tunic among them, watched them all and longed to sweep through the car, shouting some tremendous news, kindling them all to a blaze of excitement and of life.

War, of course, he thought, was bad, was inexcusable, was uncivilized and vile, and yet it did arouse a country, did fan the spirit of a people into fire, into light. But why was war the only thing that created such enthusiasm? War or a prize fight? And where was aspiration? And the fervor of pursuit of beauty, and the service of religion?

What did these people know of the joy that dances on high hills at sunrise? What did they know of anything but advertisements and the taste of gum? He would never, he vowed, go into the body of one of these dust-colored subway creatures. He could never endure being the sort of person who sat with his feet toeing in.

But by this time he had wasted a good many days, and he was not surprised one morning as he wandered into a drug-store to recognize an emissary of Iblees standing at the counter, sipping a chocolate ice-cream soda. The disguise was good, a fascinating blonde with ruby-colored lips that came off on the soda straw.

"Hello," Haroot said. "I haven't seen you for a long time."

"Enjoying yourself too much to look up your old friends, I suppose," she said. "I have a message for you from Iblees. You're to settle down in your new position before Saturday evening at six o'clock or go back to hell!"

"But this is Friday already," he said, anxiously. "And I haven't been able to find a soul I'd be if you paid me. Can't you persuade Iblees to give me a little more time?"

"You've had plenty of time," she said, sternly. "You've been frittering it away. Iblees says hurry up and make up your mind or else go back to your pit again. Do you want some soda?"

"Thanks," he said, and drank some through an offered straw.

IT WAS a pity that no one could see him, he would have caused such a sensation with his quartz-like body, his copper-colored hair and his brilliant tunic. And

he looked less haggard than he had in the pit, although he always was inclined to be a little gaunt. Still, his few weeks of recreation had done him good. He was far less introspective and depressed. Now he leaned against the soda counter and drank through one straw while Iblees' emissary sipped through the other. Haroot had quite a passion for chocolate soda, though he seldom indulged in it because most of the candy-stores made the syrup too sweet, and he didn't like the smell of drug-stores. Now he sipped, and thought, and deplored his tendency to procrastination.

"I don't see how it's possible," he said. "There isn't a soul on Azrael's list that is in any way suitable."

"You're too particular," she said. "Don't eat all the ice-cream, Haroot."

"Sorry," he said. "But I think I have a right to my own choice of bodies."

"If you were being just naturally born you wouldn't have anything to say about it."

"That's true." He considered her statement. "But then as a baby I could adjust myself more easily. As an adult it comes harder. Perhaps it is a fairly wise arrangement after all. If every baby could choose its own body what chaos there would be; nobody could ever make up its mind, and there'd be unborn babies milling around by the millions. Maeterlinck didn't half see the possibilities of that situation. No baby has much decision anyway, except in regard to food, of course."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" she said.

"Who, I? I haven't the vaguest idea." He moved away from the soda counter and leaned against a glass case of manicure articles and cosmetics. "I've spent hours matching up Azrael's list of the doomed with the Social Register, and no one is dying these days except very rich old men. And I will not be an old man."

"Then you'll have to give up the Social Register and be a poor man."

"No!" He was emphatic. "Once is enough. In my last incarnation I was a fig-seller."

"Well, you needn't be a fig-seller again. There are plenty of white-collar people."

"Yes; Azrael said he was calling a very decent teacher in one of the suburban schools—manual training. But I've had enough teaching. It would be the sheytans and djinns all over again! And another thing," he said, "how can I decide unless I know the whole situation? I want a wife, and yet I want a nice wife; and I want children, and the girl must have curly hair."

"You're too particular," she said again.

A fiend came floating in the door after a young man who walked a shade unsteadily. The fiend wandered over to Haroot and the girl. It was not in disguise, but in its own red, vaporous invisible body. "Look here," it said, "there's a woman just coming in the store now, and I have inside information that Azrael is calling her husband within the next day or two. You might take a look at her. The minute I saw her get out of a taxi I thought of you, and now what luck to find you, Haroot. That's thought transference for you!"

"Where is she?" Haroot said. "Are they in the Social Register? And have they children—and—"

"I didn't know anything about that," the fiend said impatiently. "They're the Binghams of Salt-mere."

"Oh, the Binghams of Salt-mere!" Haroot was delighted. "They're all right. They're the kind who would have a new ice-box and a small daughter with curly hair. I remember seeing them among the B's, but I had no idea he was one of the doomed ones."

"It's quite recent," the fiend said. "I have to go on with my man now. There she is, Haroot, with the dark-blue dress. I should think she'd make a good wife for you."

He floated out of the door and Iblees' emissary went around to another counter to buy some bicarbonate.

A woman in a blue dress and most becoming hat was coming toward Haroot. A porter, behind her, carried two neat black bags marked S. T. B. in gold letters. She stopped at the counter immediately opposite, where there were toys, which meant they had children.

"I'm in rather a hurry for my train," she said, and two gossiping shop-girls broke away, reluctantly. "I should like those two woolly dogs and that dollar and a half paint-box." Her voice was pleasant, with a low timbre that had charm and kindliness.

Nor was it only her voice that had charm. She was not beautiful, but to Haroot she was fascinating, for he felt in her the presence of that flame of personality, of eagerness and zest that flick-

ers down to a mere smoldering spark in all the gray, dull people that one passes by thousands Not that the flame in her was a wild fire. It was controlled and trimmed by culture and tradition and breeding, but it was there and could, he felt, flare to heights if blown by winds of emotion.

"Don't bother to wrap them up, please," she said to the girl, and took a bag from the porter and, opening it, put the dogs and the paint-box in. She paid her check at the gold-caged counter, looked back to be sure that the porter was following, and threaded her way between tables piled high with books and candy-boxes. The porter followed her, and Haroot followed the porter. She had lovely legs in the thinnest possible fawn-colored stockings and her shoes were elegant suede and with heels that were not too high. Haroot was delighted with the heels.

IN FACT, he was delighted with everything about her. He sat opposite her in an empty parlor-car seat and studied her carefully. She was a trifle thin, perhaps, a trifle serious. She would look well in a tweed sport-suit, playing golf on the long slope of some sunny fairway, or she would have looked well in the straight white robes of a Grecian woman looping ropes of laurel about the pillars of a temple, or she would have looked well in the plain blue of a madonna holding a baby close in her arms.

She would have looked absurd, he thought, in the brocaded panniers of a French court, or in a pierrette costume—as absurd as George Washington in circus tights, or a modern president in chaps and sombrero. Yet, of course, she did not look like George Washington in the least, or Coolidge, or even a madonna.

She sat leaning back in her seat, reading a magazine with poisonous green cover.

She seemed to be enjoying it. Her eyes laughed. She had taken off her hat, and Haroot liked her hair, for it was unwaved, the color of dried grasses in a field in the sunlight. It was cut short but she brushed it back from her ears, which were the most enchanting ears in the world.

Although it was hot in the train, she looked cool as if she had just been bathing in a deep blue bath with bath salts. Her dark-blue silk dress quite obviously had come from some expensive shop on Fifth Avenue. As a wife, Haroot thought, she could scarcely be improved upon, and he wondered what would be her attitude in regard to staying in bed late on Sunday mornings and reading the paper at the breakfast-table. Little things like that make all the difference in the world in marriage.

The wife of the basket-maker of Cairo, for instance, had always insisted that he take off his sandals before he entered the house. That had become a great bother. But this woman did not look in the least trivial. She seemed somewhat worried, though. There was a dark shadow under her eyes that indicated some trouble. He wondered what it could be and hoped it had nothing to do with finances or the children. He did not want to let himself in for too much trouble, particularly with this unknown mission of Iblees' hanging over his head, and what that might be he hadn't the slightest notion. He speculated upon its possibilities as the train sped through city and suburbs.

He was comfortable in his plush seat with his tunic draped artistically about him. He wished that Mrs. Benjamin Bingham of Salt-mere might be able to see him. He would make an impression, he knew. But even as he thought that, he smiled, remembering how he had been cast out of Heaven to learn humility. And he hadn't learned it. He wondered if he ever would learn it. Are we ever, he wondered, able to change fundamentally? Aren't we cut to a certain pattern, like a garment, and though we may be superficially made over and made over, surely we are the same fabric still? "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," he thought. "Now there's a silk purse," as he looked at Mrs. Benjamin Bingham. "She's made out of the finest fabric, nothing of these sleazy modern bargain-counter materials about her."

Fields rolled by outside the windows, and telegraph poles dashed back toward the city, catching up their wires as they sped. Cars waited by closed white railway gates. Sunlight lay on the trees and houses and white silent churches; and Haroot, when he saw the churches, felt a stab of pain. Always, deep inside him was longing and unhappiness. If he could only hear again that great exultant chorus of the saints and martyrs, swelling, rising, crashing in triumphant greeting to The Highest on the golden throne.

He could not bear to think of those lost

It was King Solomon's old throne that Iblees was sitting on.

glories. He would turn his mind steadfastly to his obligation to Iblees. Surely it could not matter to The Highest if one of his creatures went over to the enemy. Besides, Haroot had been, it seemed, abandoned by the Highest. What times innumerable had he cried to him from his pit, and been answered only by the echo of his own despair?

He had chosen his path and would abide by it. He would become the husband of this delightful woman opposite, and when he was not occupied with Iblees' business he would enjoy himself with golf and tennis and dinner-parties and bridge. It was hot in the train and cinders were sifting in through the window-screen in front of him. He would have liked to order some ginger-ale, but of course he couldn't. This being invisible had its disadvantages. Finally he dozed.

WHEN he got to Salt-mere he found it to be delightful. A place of small, unhurried streets, old houses, gay hollyhocks against white walls, and smooth lawns sloping to a harbor. And the Benjamin Binghams' house was one of the most delightful there. More reticent than some that crowded to the street's edge, this house was content behind a friendly group of elms and maples; and lilac and syringa bushes followed the path to its charming front door. At the back there was a sunken garden, and Haroot, wandering about its paths at dusk, drank with delight the smells of new-cut grass and mignonette and heliotrope.

He had known such a garden in a far corner of Paradise. It was Saint Cecelia's, and there, often he had been invited to tea on Sunday afternoons. They had had the most delicious honey— There was no use regretting. He must, he told himself, cultivate a more stalwart spirit, and so, as he walked about the garden between masses of delphinium and snap-dragon and phlox, he clasped his hands behind his back and recited bits of Browning, as being very conducive to the encouragement of stalwartness:

"One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better—"

He couldn't remember the next line, and looked up above his head, thinking, "—are baffled to fight better—sleep—sleep—" Above him was a tall pine black against the pale blue sky. A small gray owl sat on one of the branches and looked down at Haroot solemnly, and high up, bright as beaten silver, was the thin-sliced moon.

A swing hung from one of the branches of the pine, and Haroot sat in its wooden seat, clasping the ropes, and he swung higher and higher, till the wind blew his copper-colored hair as he flung his head back to the joy of it. He stretched out his legs, and his body, as the flame-colored tunic whirled about him, seemed luminous, made of the moon's substance but without the shadows of the moon.

A shout from the direction of the house jerked him up suddenly. He could see a small head at one of the upper windows and a child's excited voice called, "There's a berry funny man in my swing, Mother." Almost with a sense of terror he leaped from the swing and fled from the garden. He had forgotten that a child might be able to pierce his invisibility. It was a most disconcerting thought.

That night he slept in a clump of white clover, by an old dock, where boats were being built, and through his dreams ran the sound of water lapping and of crickets chirping, and the smell of the fragrance of clover and of yellow boards, new planed, and wind from salt marshes and the sea.

The next day he wandered about the town and waited, rather as one waits for the moment of an operation. Not that he expected the slipping into Benjamin Bingham's body to be painful particularly, but it was alarming; it might involve so much misery, or so much joy. If only he hadn't had to be rushed into it. But perhaps after all it was wiser. And as to Mrs. Bingham, he was filled with flutters of excitement when he thought of her.

He would have liked to go through the house and become familiar with it before he entered it as its master, but he didn't dare because of the children and, to tell the truth, he had a feeling of reluctance about entering people's houses uninvited, even though he were invisible. He did not like to intrude. So he walked about the streets, keeping to the back ones and, after eleven, when he had heard that most children took their naps, he ventured again to the Bingham place. He leaned over the picket fence, near the sunken garden and, separating clusters of high

hollyhocks, he saw his future wife picking delphinium sprays.

She was wearing a white dress, a simple silky thing, and good rubber-soled sport-shoes and white and green diamonded sport-socks. Haroot admired them immensely. Celestial beings never would wear gay bright socks, perhaps because so many of them had unattractive legs. But not all, of course. Some of the martyrs were quite charming, though few could compare with Iblees' people in that respect. He wondered if it were because the celestial beings were so busy cultivating their souls that they had no time and energy left to devote to cultivating their bodies, whereas Iblees' people never gave a rap for their souls. It was a mistake on both sides. Your soul was quite as important as your body and your body equally important as your soul.

As he leaned over the fence, wondering, a man came along wearing white duck trousers and a white sailing jersey. He, too, stopped at the fence, so near Haroot that his arm nearly went through Haroot's neck. Haroot moved quickly as the man called out:

"Hello, Sally, is Benjy out this week-end?"

"He's coming at noon," she said. "He'll be here for the race, surely."

"Good, then I'll tell Norton to be at the dock at two."

"It looks as though there would be quite a wind," she said.

"Oh, no more than a one-reefer." He raised his cap and went on.

IT WAS tragic, Haroot thought, that she was working there happily in her sunny garden and within four hours Azrael would have called away the husband that she loved. These ghastly unexpected pounces of fate were not fair to people. They should be given time to steel themselves for blows. But, after all, could they ever steel themselves? They had a hard time of it, mortals did, and they bore up remarkably well. Think of all the hordes of martyrs! It was one comfort to realize that all of them had been handed out such attractive sparkly crowns on their very arrival at Paradise. So they were compensated for having been eaten by lions and roasted alive.

As to Sally Bingham—Haroot was pleased that that was her name—he determined to be just as good a husband to her as he possibly could be, so that she might never realize her loss. And naturally she never would realize it. It was going to require a vast amount of tact and cleverness to pull the affair off successfully, but Haroot had not a doubt about his ability to handle it. Besides, he would surely run across some one of Iblees' people who could give him points as to Benjy's habits and acquaintances and things like that. He had had very little trouble adjusting when he became the fig-seller.

Sally Bingham went into the house now, and he walked on down to a wharf and sat down with his legs over the end and watched small fish flash in the weedy depths. Then he leaned against a post in the sunshine and drowsed. There were clouds looming in the west.

A shrill hoot in his ear wakened him, and he shivered in a cold wind. The sky was gray, and white triangles of sails on the harbor scudded fast beneath low clouds. He saw the misty shape of a sheytan rushing along in a puff of wind, and it cried out to him:

"Hi, wake up, now's your time. I just saw Azrael sitting on the bow of C-7 and I said, 'Hello, what are you doing here?' and he says, 'Go and wake up Haroot; he's asleep at the wharf. Then, will you come back and help me shove the mast over when we round the stake boat?' And he wants the whole blamed boat shoved over too. Whoopee! Come, hurry up, you fellows."

A whirl of mist blew about him, but it was not mist. It was a hurrying, excited crowd of djinns and sheytans and fiends screaming in the winds as they bore down upon the catboat, C-7. For one second Haroot thought, "I never thought a thing about what kind of a person Benjy is himself—only his wife." A horrible illusion of fear and excitement clutched at him in the pit of his stomach.

"Hurry," the sheytan screamed back at him, and standing, Haroot put his arms above his head and dived out into the whirl of winds. Before him he saw the mast of C-7 crack over, a fat doll-like figure topple overboard. He heard Azrael's voice, like a trumpet, shouting "Haroot, hurry!" Then he was hovering above the capsized boat with its sail flat in the water. He knew that he must dive deep to reach Benjy Bingham's body. That was not so pleasant.

With one hand he held his nose and then he dived.

CHAPTER III

SO HE had entered into the body of Benjamin Bingham and been fished, drenching, from the waves and brought to shore, and with difficulty and Red Cross first-aid methods pumped back to life. And now he lay in Benjy Bingham's bed and thought idly of the past and worried about the future, until, tired out with thought and worry, he slept.

When he woke, the nurse was putting his luncheon-tray on the table beside his bed. There seemed to be some very good soup, and the china this time was thin and white with gold bands encrusted around the edges, and there was a little bunch of pink and blue flowers on the tray, a hot little bunch, half-wilted, that looked as if it had been picked by the children. But they were comforting, an omen of some cheer in the future. And his soup smelled delicious, cream of clam with the faintest possible tinge of onion flavor. The nurse propped him up a bit and he felt horridly weak and light-headed, but the soup helped.

"I say," he said to Miss Beals suddenly, "how is the ice-box?"

"The ice-box, Honey?" She buttered a piece of bread for him, but he could feel emanations of alarm coming from her rigid calm.

"I mean, is it running all right? Perhaps I dreamed it, but we have one of those ice-boxes that make little cubes of ice, haven't we?"

"Of course," she said, and very soon she made an excuse to go over to the desk and write something down on her chart.

He realized that he would have to be more careful. He must talk very little until he had caught on a bit more, lie still and let the life of the house flow on about him until he could swim with it, without danger of choking and sinking. And it was pleasant to lie still and drowse and listen to quiet talk and laughter in distant rooms or in the garden.

As he dozed after his lunch, it was as if he were in some warm stream, in a quiet backwater with rushes bending in the wind above him, and the sounds of water chuckling and slipping past him, lapping the cool feet of the rushes, swirling into swift pools and eddies. And now and then a bee hummed past him, and the smell of salt of marshes and sweet garden flowers wove through his dream. Time slipped past with the flowing water, then a dog barked somewhere below his window and tore the fabric of sleep to ribbons. He woke with the ribbons fluttering dizzily about him and as they cleared away and vanished, he saw Sally sitting by the window, sewing. She wore a corn-color silk dress, and she was beautiful, against the soft green of the curtains.

"Do you want a drink of water?" she asked him. "The nurse has gone for a walk."

"I don't suppose it would be right to arrange to have her kidnaped by djinns or something?"

What a fool he'd been to say "djinns." He realized it the minute it was out of his mouth. It was a word no American businessman would think of using. No wonder that Sally regarded him with suspision.

"Don't you like her?" she said.

"Oh, yes; she's very efficient, but she says 'honey' too often."

Sally got up and came over to the bed, and put her hand on his forehead. Haroot wanted her to kiss him. He thought that if she only would it would make his head stop aching so infernally. And, after all, why shouldn't she? She was his wife. Why couldn't he ask her to?"

"I say," he said, "would you mind—would you mind very much kissing my forehead?"

She looked surprised, but at least did not refuse him. "Why, not at all," she said, and kissed him, coolly, impersonally, dutifully. He could have wept again. It might have been a stone pressed against his forehead, or the kiss of an ancient aunt.

"Thank you very much," he said, and then remembered what he had been wanting all morning. "Oh, I say, before you sit down again, would you mind handing me a mirror a minute?"

"Surely." She handed him a mirror from the lowboy, and went back to her sewing. Haroot, holding his breath in excitement, looked.

He could have wept at what he saw. He could have cried out aloud and rent the air with his lamentations at sight of the face that confronted him. It was the most ghastly joke, the most bitter and consuming disappointment. He was pudgy! He was pale. He was soft and silly-looking. He was utterly without charm, without attraction, without magnetism. Moreover, he looked selfish and peevish and dull.

"Good Lord," he thought. "What a blighter!"

Even as the fig-seller he had had some vestige of charm, had been a not unattractive swaggering sort of a rascal. But this body of Benjamin Bingham's! You wanted to take it out and drown it. He had leapt into the most intolerable mistake in his haste and infatuation for Sally. Why, if he had been any one else in the world he would have stood a better chance with her. Even as any unattached male, an iceman or a chauffeur or a shoe-clerk, he might have hoped to win a friendly smile from her, or a pleasant recognition of their common humanity. Nothing more, of course, would she give to any one. You could see at once that Sally was not the sort to touch evil even with the tip of her fingers. Since her husband was as he was, Sally was as remote, as inaccessible as the stars themselves.

Poor Haroot! Two tears squeezed out of his little pig's eyes and rolled down his fat cheeks, and he licked up the tears and they were salt and horrid. Why was it, he wondered, that there was always a serpent in every Eden? You think you are going to be so happy, so radiantly, blissfully happy, and then there is a worm in the chestnut, the gold crown is tarnished, the taste of your happiness turns to ashes in your mouth.

"Why did you marry him?" he burst out, unhappily.

"Him?" Sally looked startled.

"I mean me, Benjamin Bingham. How in the world did you come to marry such a looking individual? What was there behind it, what persuaded you?"

"I think you know, my dear. And I don't really think that you're up to discussing it."

"Well, I'll never be up to anything unless we do discuss it."

"You'll work up a fever."

"I'll work it up lying here thinking. Did you ever think you loved—me?"

"In the glamour of the war, I think we all saw things a little mistily."

"Oh, it was the war did it? And was I really anything in the war? It doesn't seem possible."

"What do you mean, anything? Of course it wasn't your fault that you never got over."

"No—but it was the uniform did it, I

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suppose. That's another count against war. I did all I could to stop it—talked till I was hoarse, but nobody listened—devils behind it, all of them."

"I never knew before that you felt like that about it."

"Oh, didn't you? Well, sometime I'll tell you a few things about wars, that will make your hair curl. When you see it from the inside as I did. Hung up by the heels in a pit in Babel with fiends screaming all about you. . . ."

"Well, of course, I always thought that there must have been a dreadful feeling of frustration about being held over here in those camps, but I never realized before that you felt it so intensely."

"Intensely! With men slaughtering each other by the millions and I held by the heels not able to do anything but instruct a lot of young fiends and devils. . . ."

"Of course the A.E.F. had its faults, but you never spoke of them so extremely before, and they said you were a very good instructor of artillery."

"Artillery!" Then he realized. He, Benjamin Bingham, had been an instructor in an army camp during the war. How they had been talking at cross-purposes. How ridiculous, how delightful! How absurd he had sounded. He leaned back among his pillows and laughed uproariously.

"My dear," he said, "I think there is a chance for us yet."

BUT as time went on poor Haroot was not so sanguine about the chance for them. Even in the midst of his first disappointment he could not believe that he could fail to impress Sally favorably. He had always been so successful before as far as women were concerned, rather too successful, in fact. He remembered certain notes from some of the younger and more impressionable female martyrs that had been rather embarrassing. It had come to such a point with one of them that he had had to give up going to Cecelia's teas. She had always been there, languishing in a corner of a sunny wall with daffodils about her feet, and Saint Jerome's lion, which had taken a fancy to her, dozing nearby.

She had wanted Haroot to sit beside her every minute, and when he didn't, she had gazed at him with pools of tears in her eyes and absent-mindedly got her long sleeves in her bread and honey and altogether made him feel so uncomfortable that he had finally given up and stayed at home. But still he might have sat beside her if Jerome's lion had not growled at him so. Sometimes Haroot regretted that incident.

And there had been other incidents when he had been the fig-seller, incidents unconnected with the basket-maker's wife, even. He regretted those too—though for other reasons. Of course the celestial affairs had all been purely aesthetic and Platonic, whereas the adventures in Cairo —well, those had not been his fault really. His body and personality had been chosen for him and the fig-seller's character had been definitely formed. He could not help it if he had that fatal attraction and charm. And, hang it all, it was fun to be attractive. Even his quartz-like illusion of a body had been an enjoyable possession, particularly when enhanced by the glory of the brilliant tunic. And now he was fat and pudgy and irritable and unloved. A mirror was an insult, a jeer, a challenge to rebellion. Whenever poor Haroot, as he grew stronger and was up and about the house, passed a mirror and saw his revolting self in its pleasant depths, he sank to even lower levels of despair. Once when he looked in one, he thought, "But it isn't I, really—the bulge is Benjy, not Haroot," and he stuck his tongue out to his image. The waitress saw him, and he felt an utter fool.

It was too bad, for if he had been happy he would have been so very happy in the Bingham household. But it was a case of, "If I had some ham I'd give you some ham and eggs if I had some eggs." Everything was present except the right ingredients. Yet there were so many things that were exactly right.

He had achieved his ice-box. Every morning at eleven fruit juice was served to him on the terrace. Miss Beals had gone, to his relief, and the waitress now brought him his little trays of nourishment, his plates of French rolls and sweet butter, his glasses of golden orange juice, or amber grapefruit juice or ruby grape juice, with cubes of ice that tinkled against the edges of the glass and melted all too soon. Delight to lie out in his long chair on the terrace with sunlight and shadow playing through the maple leaves of trees above his head. Delight to breathe the smells of salt and grass and flowers, to feel the cold tang of fruity liquid slipping down his throat, to smooth the soft head of the black kitten by his chair's side. Delight

to listen to Sally practicing in the living-room.

Even the rhythmic monotony of scales was soothing, and when she played Chopin, the preludes, the nocturnes, he shut his eyes and felt such happiness, and yet such poignant desire for her love that tears burned his eyelids. He wanted to sob aloud and fling himself on her shoulder as the children did, for comfort. But for him she had no comfort, only courtesy, only at best a sort of humorous kindness. That was all.

Yet she took excellent care of him. He had the cream of everything. For instance, little special dishes were always brought in and put before him at the table. An alligator pear, for himself alone, or a particularly luscious peach or plum or apple, or a squab, perhaps, when she and the children were having minced lamb and baked potatoes; and puff-paste desserts were passed to him while the others indulged in apple sauce or prunes. He began to think about his meals beforehand, to dream about them at night, to send the waitress out for another quince tart with more whipped cream this time. He began to watch the clock for breakfast time, for eleven, for one, for teatime, and for dinner. . . . And then there was the question of his thirst. That was something more serious, a sinister thing.

Even when he was the fig-seller of Cairo he had never cared unduly for the fruits of the vine. A little now and then he had enjoyed, it is true. But he had never in his life experienced such a ravening desire, such a shouting of his appetites for the taste of alcohol in his mouth. He found a flask in the lower left-hand corner of Benjy Bingham's lowest bureau-drawer. It was tucked away under a pile of old duck trousers and it was nearly full. And he found a bottle of gin on the shelf of Benjy's closet beneath an aged derby hat. And he discovered a bottle of cognac inside the leg of a pair of fishing trousers in the closet, and two bottles of Scotch behind the books of the book shelf.

From these hidden treasures he deduced the fact that Benjy's drinking was not the jovial, merry and harmless sport it is with many gentlemen, but that there was something furtive and evil about it; that these bottles were hidden from the eye of Sally, that here, perhaps, was one of the reasons for the naked sword. He ranged the bottles on his table and sat studying them, and his desire to open and drink from them was like a fire that burned his throat, his tongue, his whole interior apparatus. The horrible intemperate desires of Benjy Bingham flayed him like fiends with scorching lashes. But one who had lighted the lamps of Heaven could not conceal a bottle of spirituous liquor within the legs of fishing trousers. It lacked dignity. If he was going to drink, he would drink at the table like a gentleman, not like a small boy behind the barn, with an eye for his father's belt.

THE urgings of Benjy Bingham's body cried out wildly that Haroot pull out the cork of the Scotch and take one drink, only a little one. But he set his jaw and resolutely jammed the cork in tighter. Then he took the bottles in his arms and set out to find Sally.

As soon as he opened the bedroom door he heard her playing the *Moonlight Sonata*. It was not the moment for bursting in upon her with such equipment, he realized fully, and yet it must be done.

It was a delightful room, the living-room, with windows that looked out upon the terrace, and past the terrace to gay colors of the garden and then beyond to cool blue breadths of bay. And in the room were the pleasant fragrances of bay and garden, mingled, one must admit, with the faintest possible odors, sometimes, of floor-wax or brass polish, for everything in the room gleamed, that should gleam, and everything glowed with a deep warm brown luster, that should glow. Here, too, as in the bedrooms, New England ancestors had done well by their Bingham and Terry descendants—Sally was a Terry, of Salem, and her ancestors had been sea-captains when the great white clipper-ships ruled the seas. It was Jahleel Terry who had brought back the gorgeous square of embroidered dragon that clawed and spat gold stitches of flame upon the wall above the mantel. It had been done by attendants in a Buddhist temple beneath the sound of gongs and winds and whispering pine-trees, a red temple incredibly high on the crags of a mountain. And incense still clung to the threads of vivid silk.

It was Jahleel Terry, too, who brought back the small Chinese junk of carved ivory that stood on the Binghams' mantel, a fascinating junk, with inch-high mandarins on the deck, indulging in eternal, infinitesimal cups of ivory tea, with eternal attitudes of ivory courtesy; and an ivory

lantern swinging from the stern. And Jahleel had brought back the scarlet leather chest beneath the window, and the white jade dogs on the white book-shelves, and the Ming bowl that held sweet-peas on the piano.

But his daughter, Good-Will Terry, had at the age of eight fashioned the sampler on the wall above the desk. And the Bingham ancestors had supplied the rush-bottomed chairs, banister and ladder-backed, as well as the Chippendale desk and tables. And Sally herself had bought deep comfortable chairs and davenport and caused them to be covered with gay and charming chintz.

Now, she sat at her piano playing the *Moonlight Sonata*, and through its strains wove also the sound of the children's voices as they played out in the garden, and there was also the rhythmic hum and trundle of the vacuum cleaner cleaning rugs upstairs. But Sally was lost in her liquid melodies of moonlight, and Haroot, coming downstairs clasping his armful of bottles, realized what an awful moment it was to burst in upon her.

He saw the rapt lift of her face—he loved the clear line from her chin to her ear, the fine, pure look about her. He did so long to have her say something really nice and friendly to him. One of his bottles was slipping. He hoped it wouldn't crash on the floor. She had just got to that glorious part, *la-la la-la, la-la la-la, tee-dee dee-dum, tee-dee dee-dum.* The bottle did slip from his arms, crash on the hard-wood floor and break into a thousand fragments. A horrifying pool of brownish liquid spread and emanated jovial alcoholic fumes.

"Damn," he said, his spirit quaking. "I'm most awfully sorry, Sally." He must carry this thing off with dignity. "I found these things upstairs and was just bringing them down to you to put them away—"

"Don't wipe that up with your handkerchief." It was remarkable how well she adjusted herself to the change of mood. She was thoroughbred. The basket-maker's wife now would have raised Cain. But Sally had leapt from her piano stool with perfect self-control, only a shade of exasperation on her face and in her voice, and she was turning back the rug and telling him not to use his handkerchief as a floor rag. He put the other bottles in a row on the hearthstone and picked up broken glass while Sally went for a mop. He was very glad she had not called the waitress. When she came back with the mop he had a handful of broken glass and didn't know what to do with it.

"As I was saying," he said, picking up splinters, "I found these in my room."

"Found is a good way of putting it," she said, and he realized that it had been a foolish word to use under the circumstances, but it would be best to let that pass.

"They don't belong there at all."

"I'm glad you realize that at last," she said.

"I think," he said, "that it would be better to keep them where they do belong, and I shall have a glass now and then when I want it."

"If it will occasionally be 'then' and not always 'now' when you want it."

"Look here," he said, and she interrupted him—

"Benjy, don't throw that broken glass in the fireplace."

"What'll I do with the blamed stuff?"

"Give it to me."

"Not at all; it'll cut your hands to ribbons and then you can't play Chopin and Beethoven so gorgeously. Can I chuck this out of a window?"

"Mercy no; the children will walk on it. Wrap it in this newspaper and put it in the waste-basket."

HE OBEYED her, and she finished mopping the floor and putting the rug in place. It was very pleasant, working about together, and he liked the efficient way her hands did things. There was no fussiness or futility about them, no waste motion and awkwardness.

"You do use your hands well," he said. "How did you learn to? You might almost have been making baskets all your life. But the wife-of-the-basket-maker's hands had been blunt at the tips, capable but ugly, and Sally's were sensitive, keen hands, charming.

"I suppose playing the piano does it," she said rather brusquely, "and making the children's clothes. You never seemed to notice my hands before, Benjy."

"No? Well, you know, I think that rap on the head by the mast was something of an eye-opener. I mean I think I see things a bit differently." That seemed to him a diplomatic thing to say at the moment. "And, you know, my dear, I don't think you need worry about those bottles. I'm not going to be at it all the time. I never have been."

"Never, Benjy?"

"Well, I mean, what I mean is—" It was almost unbearable to be so despised for faults that were not his own faults but wretched shortcomings of the beastly Benjy. And there was no way for poor Haroot to justify himself. He simply had to swallow it. "What I mean is," he said, "I'm not going to be at them all the time anyway. I don't want those cursed bottles in my old derby hats and fishing trousers. Hang it all, my dear, I am not an unclean spirit."

She laughed without bitterness, almost for a moment as if she were laughing with the children. Haroot felt most tremendously thrilled by it.

"You have taken to using the most remarkable phraseology, Benjy. Anyway, I hope these good resolutions will continue."

"You seem to doubt it." Her tone had dampened his elation.

"I don't mean to be unkind, my dear, but we have had them before." And at that she went out of the room with her mop and armful of bottles.

There was a mirror above a table, an old colonial mirror with a golden eagle atop. Beneath the eagle Haroot saw reflected a pudgy fat man with a woebegone expression.

"It's an awful mess," he thought gloomily, and wandered out into the garden behind the house.

It seemed impossible to rid himself of that gloomy feeling about his present situation.

He had a depressing sense of his inadequacy, a gnawing whisper of the conscience that for once he had bitten off more than he could chew. He had carried off the fig-seller affair so triumphantly, at least so agreeably, that he had never appreciated the difficulties in adjusting himself to a modern American household. Here the social contacts were so varied, the shades and problems of personalities so subtle and difficult to grasp. Why, the very matter of the names of the members of his own family took him days to master. Sally, of course, was his wife, Alice-Anne his seven-year-old daughter, and Timmy and Robin his twin boys, aged five. Those he had known from the first day or two. And as to Miss Beals, the trained nurse, she left after a week. But there were also the domestics, who had to be gradually straightened out in his mind; Rosie the

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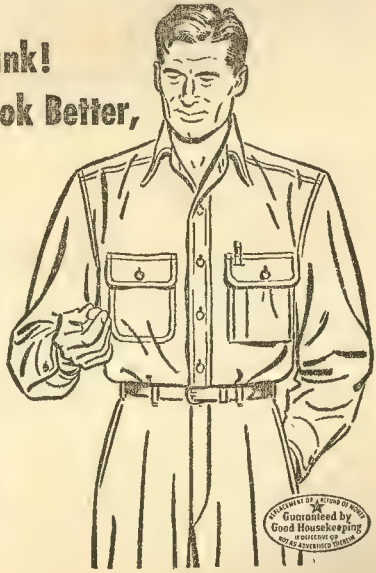


BIG YANK
SHIRTS
PANTS

waitress, Ellen the cook, Petra the children's nurse, and James the gardener.

And then there was Grandma! For quite a week before he was up and about he had lain in bed and puzzled over the problem of Grandma. He heard the children calling to her under his window and he wondered if she were supposed to be his mother, or Sally's. Then as days passed and she did not appear, he could not imagine the reason for her indifference toward him. It seemed so unnatural and odd. He finally decided that she must be his mother-in-law and perhaps they were not on the best of terms. That was a bother. He didn't want life to be complicated by the presence of a hostile relation. He visualized a stern old lady with snow-white hair and hawklike nose.

Once he asked Alice-Anne tentatively, "Where's Grandma this afternoon?" And the child said, "I think she's sleeping under the lilac bushes. She likes it there in the sun." After that he had to soften his mental picture, put a little old lace around the neck of his grandmother and imagine a somewhat less austere old lady, drowsing in a deck-chair in the sun.

But still Haroot could not understand why the children were allowed to address her as they did. "Hi, Grandma, Grandma, Grandma!" they would call over and over again. And one day he heard Timmy shouting in a frenzy of excitement, "Mother, the Blakes' dog just chased Grandma up the apple-tree!" Of course it must have been a low-branched tree, perhaps with steps and an old lady might be afraid of one of those ferocious German police-dogs. Nevertheless, the vision of the invisible grandmother grew curious and a bit macabre.

"She's a little crazy," he thought, "and that's why she doesn't come up and see me." Then one afternoon when he was dozing, he heard a purr and felt a thud on his bed clothes, and Timmy, racing down the hall, called, "Oh, there's Grandma. She's just jumped on top of Father." And Haroot opened his eyes to see a small black kitten with a paw raised to pat his face.

BUT all the mysteries were not as easy to solve as that of Grandma. He felt a panic at the thought of meeting groups of strangers. What would happen when he had to go to dinners with Sally, to the golf club, to his office, to teas? Fortunately Dr. Adams had discouraged social activities for the present and so given Haroot time to get his footing. While it was so precarious, he went carefully, tried to talk as little as possible, read a great deal and spent hours with the children. They were the best sources of instruction that he had.

He learned from them that Mrs. Blake was the funny lady next door who wore her hats on top of her head and had a dog named Scotty; that Mrs. Van Schenk always whistled between her teeth when she talked, and that Mr. Martin looked like a monkey and that Mrs. Martin liked to kiss people, but not ladies and children, only men.

From these and other valuable characterizations he was able to identify several of Benjy Bingham's acquaintances, and once or twice when he went out in the car with Sally he was able to carry off chance meetings with a certain amount of poise. But the children did not prepare him for Miss Jennings. He had never heard her name. He had heard about Aunt Anne, and had gathered an impression of a pleasant small old lady who wore black and had gray hair and was somewhat shy and near-sighted.

So one noon, a rainy noon at that, when the light was not very good in the dining room, Haroot came downstairs for lunch and saw a small, black clad, gray-haired old lady standing by the window. Sally and the children were not down yet and poor Haroot was filled with horror. "Who the deuce is she?" he thought. "Do I kiss her, or what?" Then she turned and he thought, "It's Aunt Anne, of course," and went over and took her hands and kissed her and said:

"Well, but it's good to see you again!"

The lady gasped and shoved him from her with a feeble squeak. Rosie, coming in the swinging door with a pitcher of milk, emitted a sound like a gurgle and backed through the door again, and Sally, coming from the hall with the children clattering about her, said:

"I'm sorry to be late. Miss Jennings, will you sit here. Be quiet, children. Benjy, you have a very special squab this noon, my dear. He's been very ill you know, Miss Jennings. The mast gave him a terrible knock on the head. It's remarkable that he is as well as he is— I think it would be wise to cut those curtains out this afternoon. You know that chintz I bought in May, the black circles and the birds of paradise. We'll put those in the third-floor guest-room."

So the conversation progressed, and Haroot realized miserably that he had kissed Miss Jennings, the seamstress, and had had to be excused on the ground of his illness. It shook his confidence dreadfully. He felt very insecure about his judgment for many days after that unfortunate affair. No one can expect to be hit on the head with a mast and not be at least slightly the worse for it for awhile. But he did not want to get the reputation of being really queer and he felt that something more drastic must be done. He was worrying very much about the future, the day when he would have to go in to Benjy's office and pick up all those absolutely unfamiliar threads.

When he had gone into this undertaking he had counted on the help of djinns or demons who were sure to have had intimate acquaintance with Benjy in his office and in his home. But to his disappointment the supernatural creatures had left him alone entirely, and, to tell the truth, they seemed so out of place in the atmosphere of Sally's house that he hesitated to summon any to his aid. They were all right in their way, of course, but he hated to think of red vaporous bodies hovering about Robin and Timmy and Alice-Anne.

The djinns were notoriously mischievous, and imps were really dangerous, and as for celestial beings, most of them were so impractical and inaccurate and ethereal, that he doubted if any of them would know the difference between the doorman in Benjy's safe-deposit company and the most important client who ever came to him for legal advice.

Then, unexpectedly, he was saved from this dilemma by the appearance of Miss Wrinkle—an absurd name which inspired him to helpless laughter when he heard it first. He was out in the garden, building houses out of packing-boxes for the children, and Sally had come to him looking the spirit of charm itself, in her corn-colored dress, walking across the lawn. "Miss Wrinkle is here with some papers for you to sign," she said. "Do you feel able to see her?" Whereupon Haroot had inexplicably burst into laughter, and when Sally asked him what was the joke, he had to say, "I've just thought how absurd her name is," which was exceedingly feeble and made him feel like a fool. Nevertheless, he left the children lamenting and went in with Sally, and there in the cool dim hall met Miss Wrinkle, who turned out to be his secretary—a tall girl with a complexion smooth as a magazine cover, and eyes to match.

She, he saw at once, was of quite a different fiber from the Binghams' group of associates, a simple, nice girl, good at her job and unafflicted by any tendencies to vivisect the mental or emotional actions and reactions of every last person she happened to meet. She knew that he had been hit on the head by a falling mast and nearly drowned, and that he was still far from well and had to be humored. It wouldn't matter to her what apparently idiotic question he took it into his head to ask.

There was a small sewing-room next to his bedroom, and he asked Sally if he might use this temporarily as an office, for a few hours every day. She consented, of course, and there he and Miss Wrinkle sat and went over papers and problems and cases, and he confided to her that he was suffering from an almost complete loss of memory, but that if she would help him he was sure to get it back. She said, "Oh, yayas, isn't that a shame, now?" very sympathetically, shining her nails on the palm of her hand the while, and never turned a hair when he asked who Milton J. Ambrose was.

She might have been expected to betray a little surprise at that, for Milton Ambrose was Benjy's cousin and had been his partner, but this she explained with complete and unruffled calm. He found that he could ask her all sorts of questions about the family, for instance, and she seemed able to answer any of them; the names of Sally's brothers, and where Benjy had lived when he was a boy, what schools he had been to, why he had been expelled from St. Boniface's, how he had lost the Princeton baseball game his last year at Yale, and why.

It would have been better if they could have had a more secluded place for such instructions. Sally or Miss Jennings were always coming in and out, saying, "Excuse me, I have to get some buttons," or tape, or elastic, or snappers, and fumbling through the drawers that efficiently lined the walls of the room. Or the waitress had to come in to get the electric iron, or the nurse had to hunt for the children's sweater-frames.

Sometimes it was a bit awkward to have a knock at the door while he was asking, "Who in thunder *is* Aunt Anne; is she married?" Then he would have to say, "Come in," and pretend that he was deep in questions of law. Sometimes such

swift changes of subject gave him a guilty expression, and he fancied that Sally regarded him with grave suspicion once or twice. And whenever she went out she left the door wide open. He wondered if he had stumbled upon another failing of Benjy's. But that was one thing he really could not ask Miss Wrinkle.

THINGS now began to go a little better. He was beginning to find some enjoyment in life again. He had issued an edict against all the small special dishes of food that were served to him. It caused a pang, for the appetites of Benjy's body were reluctant to bow themselves before Haroot's will, but they did, after struggle, and now when Sally and the children had minced lamb and applesauce for lunch, Haroot had it too. And he fancied that Sally regarded him with a shade more warmth in her eyes and tone, and addressed him with a shade more enthusiasm.

There was a good deal of the stoic about Sally. She liked cold baths and simple foods and hard work. He never saw her sitting idle, and she spent surprisingly little time on bridge and the more frothy social affairs. No wonder the softness of her husband had annoyed her and caused the unsheathing of the naked sword. Sally was a person who considered her body a fine tool for carving life into forms of strength and beauty.

There was nothing of the houri about Sally. She would have despised lying about on cushions in white silver gardens of delight. But Benjy, Haroot surmised, was psychologically a good deal of an Oriental. Haroot had discovered certain books, as well as the bottles, concealed in various places in his bedroom, books, which, he realized, would have met a swift end in the flames had Sally chanced upon them. To tell the truth, they rather disgusted Haroot himself.

When he considered it, it seemed almost a hopeless task that confronted him, the gradual changing of Benjy's physical aspects to fit Haroot's own personality. If he did not keep up his morale he would become completely merged in Benjy. The body would conquer, which in this case was an unendurable thought. But in some respects it was necessary to give in to the physical equipment of Benjy. There was the matter of memory. Haroot himself had no knowledge of law or modern American business. For such problems he had to travel the thought-roads in Benjy's brain. And fortunately, with Miss Wrinkle's help, he was soon able to find his way upon those paths alone.

But there were many paths of thought, mere lanes or byways, that were opened by a chance word or phrase, and before he knew it Haroot would be led to some utterly unexpected remark or absurd action. Why, for instance, if he ever chanced to hear the word "Frenchman" was he impelled to lengthy invective against that pleasant race? He had really the highest admiration for them, but several times he found himself launching forth upon a tirade against their manners and morals and foreign policy and art. And Sally would listen with tightened lips and finally make some excuse to leave the room. "I must have taken over some ridiculous prejudice of Benjy's," Haroot thought, after the third occurrence, and determined that he would not fly into a frenzy at the word again.

But there were other words, and other sub-conscious prejudices. There was one in favor of Masons. He went on lauding the praises of Masonic orders, one night at dinner, and realized suddenly that his monologue had lasted through soup and steak and salad, even to the beginning of dessert. No wonder Sally's eyes looked far away, and bored. He laughed, realizing what he had been doing, and Sally looked at him, startled.

"My dear," he said, "I should think you would want to take me out and drown me. I don't really care two hoops about the Masons, you know. The word seems to set off something inside me that's wound up, a spring or something."

"You have quite a good many such springs, haven't you, Benjy?" she said, and Haroot answered:

"Well, I suppose I have. What are the worst ones, Sally? Do tell me. I do wish you would. Please now. Be nice!"

If she had known how desperately anxious he was that she should tell him, she might have. But she only shook her head and said:

"No; I think you know them as well as I do."

"But I don't," he said, "I truly don't."

Consequently he had to be constantly on the look-out for Benjy's peculiarities, and mannerisms, and it got to be very wearisome. It was so difficult to tell at that time which were Benjy's thought-roads and which were really his own.

He was feeling exceedingly discouraged about it one afternoon, a Sunday, when he and Sally went to tea next door at Mrs. Blake's. It was the first time he had been out among people, and he was intensely nervous. In fact, he was almost stage struck. As Sally came out to join him on the terrace, he felt that his hands were clammy and he said:

"I'm afraid I can't stick it, Sally. I'll just stay here with the children, and read or something. You go ahead."

"Nonsense!" she said. "Dr. Adams says that you must get out a little now, Benjy. Make an effort."

"Yes; but he didn't say how much of an effort. This is a colossal effort. I'm as terrified to go over among those people as if they were a group of roaring lions."

Timmy, dragging behind him a small red wagon filled with gravel, heard the last phrase and pleaded:

"Mother, don't make Father go into lots of lions."

But she was obdurate. "Come on, Benjy," she insisted. "I've put on my new dress just to go over and I won't go alone and I don't want to waste it."

"Yes, that would be a pity," he agreed. It was a delightful dress, a pale tan flowery chiffon, and she wore a most becoming leghorn hat. "But who will be there? And won't they all jaw about the mast hitting me?"

"What if they do? It won't hurt you."

"No; but who will be there?"

"Why, you know as well as I do. Just the usual group—the Van Schenks and Judy and Jerry Martin and Bill Bistle, perhaps, and that new couple, the Vanes. She writes, I believe."

"No priests?" he said. "I won't go a step if we're apt to meet any priests there."

"You'd be just as apt to meet a Parsee," she said, and he chuckled.

"A Parsee in this environment would be funny. But how about Episcopal clergymen? I won't go if—"

"Don't begin that, I beg of you, Benjy. If it's a new prejudice, you can kill it here and now. You may meet Mr. Cobb there, of course, although I doubt it. You're acting like a child. Will you come?" She looked at him very sternly and he felt crushed.

"Yes, I'll come," he mumbled, and all the way across their back garden and through the hole in the hedge between the Blakes' and their place, he thought about how unfair it was that Sally should think his aversion to priests and clergymen was merely a matter of dislike. It wasn't that at all. He had the highest respect for them, as men, and for their beliefs and observances. But he was afraid of them, frankly. It would be so excessively awkward if he were discovered. And of course by their apostolic succession they inherited all sorts of powers over spirits and devils. It would be most unpleasant to meet one of their cloth.

AS THEY walked up the path of the Blakes' garden he scanned eagerly the group of people on the lawn but saw, to his relief, no black-clad gentlemen. They were either dressed as he was in white flannels and blue coat, or in golf suits. And the women were in white and flowery dresses, very pretty, but none as lovely as Sally or with half her dignity and grace and charm.

Then they were among the group, and it had closed about them with glad ejaculations of greetings—men shaking his hand and thumping his back, women smoothing his coat-sleeves and saying how well he looked, wasn't it wonderful that he was up and around again? One enthusiastic young woman in jade-green flung herself upon him and kissed him, and a man, though apparently not her husband, dragged her off and said:

"Here, Judy, go easy with Benjy. He's not up to your speed yet. You'll get him all in a fever again."

There was laughter, and Benjy felt all their eyes upon him and knew that he was idiotically blushing. "Yes, I think I feel my temperature rising already," he said, and mopped his forehead with a handkerchief, and there was more laughter and the sound of ice rattling in a shaker, and Mrs. Blake's English voice as she said: "Do sit down, everybody; don't let Benjy stand so long, he's very weak still. What a mercy that you weren't drowned, Benjy!"

"I'm rather glad myself," he said. "No, Judy, thank you." He was proud of the way he called the jade-green girl Judy. "I'm on the wagon. But I'll take one of these cheese things if I may. How many of them may I eat?" He fixed Mrs. Blake with his eye as he said that, for the thought had occurred to him that he hadn't the vaguest idea whether or not he called her by her first name and if he did, what it was. Possibly Emmeline.

Even without her hat she had a Victorian air about her—the sort of woman who always sits straight in a chair and whose hair is apt to straggle in wisps at the back. But she was a very nice person, Haroot thought, and his conscience bit him slightly for such thoughts about her hair. She *was* very nice, and she told him that he could eat all the little cheese things he wanted, but he said:

"Oh, no, I can't; you see, Sally is watching me and she says I have a tendency—"

Then they laughed at him, and somebody said that Sally was a tyrant and he said:

"Tyrant is a mild word. You've no idea how brutal she is to me."

"It's a crime the way she treats you," Judy cried, "and you just dragged back from drowning. You ought to be married to some one who understands you—"

"I think she understands me too well." It had gone far enough. He wasn't going to have Sally ragged by the obnoxious green Judy. He turned the laughter against himself, and flippant, gay bits of speech broke about him like bubbles. He subsided in his chair and drank his tea and ate small cheese things and listened carefully.

"You ought to be thankful to that mast, Sally.—Benjy's a new man.—Looks fifty percent better.—Gosh, but I thought he was done for.—A man be down but never out, eh, Benjy?—Oh, come on, take one, it won't hurt you. Let me press one of these little cakes upon you. Cake—take it away, woman, it's poison to me, I gained a pound and a half last week—do you want me to have Benjy's figure?—Yes, but Benjy's thinner, he's almost a perfect 36 now, aren't you, darling?"

So they accepted him. He didn't have to say much, just sit back and now and then blow a bubble of flippancy to join and burst with the others. It was rather fun. Everyone was very friendly and amusing. And the garden was attractive, though not so lovely as Sally's. This was more formal.

The place where tea was served was on a lawn below and behind the Blake's house, a room, as it were, with privet walls and black wicker furniture with brilliant chintz cushions. But the privet wall toward the bay was lacking, and a sanded path led to a garden below, with a pool, and flowers massed about it, a group of yellow flowers, a mass of blue, a crowd of blended lavenders and pink.

Sally's method was better, Haroot thought. Nothing was as set and determined. In her garden if a blue flower wanted to grow beside a yellow one it was not a crime. And yet the effect was charming. Her borders were wilder but more subtle. And their view of the bay was better, too. From the Blake's garden you saw the back of a carpenter's shop on the wharf and only a small bit of the blue of the water. Still, it was beautiful, and the sun was warm and pleasant, and the people were good to look at and to talk to. He was very glad that he had come.

That was an odd woman in the corner of the privet wall, one Olga Vane. He had just been introduced to her, so evidently they were not old friends. She had sat herself near the privet because it made such a good background for her—the dark shiny green behind her lemon-yellow dress and her black hair and the black wicker of the furniture. She was smoking, lazily, watching the group through half-closed eyes.

SHE was alone for a moment, for the man who had been with her had gone off to get more sandwiches. But quite obviously she was not the sort of woman who sits long alone.

"Come and talk to me," she said, and Haroot got up and with difficulty carried his plate and cup and saucer and wicker chair over beside her. She smiled at his struggles, particularly when the cushion slipped out of the chair-seat and tangled itself among his feet. He was forced to put his teacup on the grass, and the Blakes' Scotch terrier wandered along and put its nose in it, and the woman in lemon yellow laughed.

"Of course, it is funny," Haroot said, as he subsided into the chair beside her. "It's a fate I'm pursued by. Some fiend or other always gets in whatever thing I touch—objects, I mean. Then they shove the thing over and smash it or make me drop it or something. I suppose it's because some young demons have a grudge against me. Perfectly natural."

The woman opened her eyes a little wider, and smiled. Her voice was smooth and drawling, like molasses, when she spoke.

"Why should young demons have a grudge against you?"

"I offended them in some way, I suppose, and now they're taking it out on me, vin-

dictive creatures. But naturally, I was in a position where I couldn't help setting some of them against me."

"What sort of position?"

"Oh, exceedingly unpleasant—hung—" He caught her eyes upon him staring with undue interest, and he gulped.

"Hung?" she asked.

"Hungry," he said. "I'm awfully hungry still, aren't you? Those tomato-salad sandwiches look great. Can't I get you some?"

"No, thank you. They're too moist. The mayonnaise fairly drips out of them."

It did. Haroot, having salvaged a sandwich, was trying to catch escaping tomato and mayonnaise with his tongue. He felt that he was not doing it adroitly, nor was he encouraged when the lemon-yellow woman laughed.

"Your demons are in that, too, you see," she said. "Why are you afraid of me?"

"I think because of your eyes," he said, and licked a seed of tomato off his chin. "People with eyes that long shape of yours always terrify me, particularly when they wear dangly earrings."

"You're laughing at me."

"Not at all. I'm admiring your earrings."

"So you're not going to tell me about your demons after all?"

"Not today. I only talk about them on Tuesday and Thursday between three and five."

"Perhaps you'll have tea with me some Thursday?"

"I couldn't without my Sally," he said firmly. "It's awfully good of you, but in Salt-mere we never go anywhere without our wives."

"I'm sorry that you're afraid of me," she said, "because you can be yourself with me and not with any of the rest of these people."

He was alarmed. The woman was too astute. The kind who pries open all possible doors of your soul and peeks through the keyholes of those she cannot open. He felt as though in another minute she would say, "You are really a person with a quartz body and a flame-colored tunic with an embroidered border of palm leaves and peacocks." But although he was afraid of her, he was rather attracted and fascinated. After all, it was amusing to have met some one with whom one could be so much oneself.

"You're not really at home with these people, are you?" she said. "Not quite oriented?"

He wasn't entirely sure what the word meant, so he took refuge in an evasion. "Well, you see, I had a really bad rap on the head with that mast."

"So I've heard," she said. "But if I were you, Mr. Bingham, I shouldn't repress myself too much. I should be myself."

"But of course I'm myself," he insisted. "You write, don't you? I remember Sally said you did. I'm awfully sorry I don't think I've ever read anything—"

"Very few people have," she said, and evidently had not enjoyed his remark. "I have to capture my husband, Mr. Bingham. Don't forget. Some Tuesday or Thursday for tea between three and five."

Her husband was a tall cadaverous creature with sandy complexion and hair that reminded Haroot of a whisk-broom. He had been having a beautiful time with Judy and the cocktail shaker.

Sally had walked down the garden with old Blake. He, now, was like an amiable, nervous little chipmunk, rather fat and gray.

"I'll join them," Haroot thought. "It's time to go home anyway and perhaps there'll be time to play a bit with the kids before supper." He felt that he had carried off the afternoon remarkably well, and by now he had fitted almost all the people with their names. He was not in the least shy about saying good-by to them. He asked Judy if she wanted her kiss back again, and he went down into the garden after Sally with a warm wave of laughter following him—a very pleasant sound.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE whole, after the tea-party, he felt, as Olga Vane had expressed it, much better oriented. It had been wise of Iblees to give him time to adjust himself to his new environment. But he needed more time still. He was not nearly ready when the call came for him. He was aghast when he looked up from his reading, one afternoon, and saw a djinn slowly evolving itself from the stream arising from the spout of the teapot at his elbow. It was a blue Wedgewood teapot, and a djinn seemed entirely out of place appearing from its spout.

Haroot laid down his book. It was Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* and he enjoyed it immensely.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, perhaps rudely, but he felt far from cordial, it must be confessed.

The djinn completed the assembling of itself, and hooked one vaporous arm over the branch of the maple tree overhanging the terrace.

"You're sent for," he said. "Iblees says you've wasted enough time. He says you waste more time than any one he's ever known."

"I've been a very sick man," Haroot answered. "I'm not in any condition yet to undertake any big undertaking. What does he want me for, do you know?" In all the strain of adjusting himself to the Binghams' problems he had sometimes almost forgotten that Iblees had sent him on a secret and mysterious mission. Sealed orders. Now it was nearly time to break the seal and he felt a touch of dread. "Does he want me to do anything very important?" he asked.

The djinn giggled, and a passing wind blew his body in ripples and waves. "Nobody has been told officially," he said, "but there's a rumor around, and I wouldn't be in your shoes, I tell you; I wouldn't be in your shoes for anything. I'd rather be in the sixth hell beneath the earth.

"And, by the way," he added, "you're to go to Iblees' office Friday. It's in that tall green and gold building near Forty-second Street. I've forgotten just where, but you can't miss it. He's on the twenty-first floor, name of A. P. W. Smith and Sons. Two o'clock in the afternoon. Don't be late."

A wind blew and the djinn wafted away; a fog with limbs that climbed and sifted itself through the dark branches of the maple tree. From near the top it turned and grinned down at Haroot and waved a misty hand, then floated off and vanished toward the sun.

"How rotten," Haroot thought. "And they all say they wouldn't be in my shoes. It must be something beastly enough." He picked up *The Forsyte Saga* again, but could not put his mind to it. He was too upset by the news that the djinn had brought him. They were all malicious creatures, and it didn't do to take them too seriously, but there must be some truth in what it had said. It wouldn't be in Haroot's shoes for anything. It would rather be in the sixth hell beneath the earth. That was a particularly unattractive spot that Haroot had always avoided because it was dark and dank and craggy, and infested with scorpions the color and size of black mules with tails like spears. Anything must be pretty bad to be worse than that. And to have a djinn think so, when the djinns were, to use the expression, exceedingly hard-boiled, was more than disquieting.

It must be a very unpleasant mission that Iblees had selected for him. The mere thought of it made him feel almost sea-sick, not actively but qualmish, as he had felt when he had been summoned to the green mountains of Kaf.

THERE were times when it seemed to Haroot that existence was too painful to be endured. If only one could lie in the sun beneath the lilac bushes and let life sweep over and by one as Grandma was doing, dreaming perhaps, of mice and milk. From his chair on the terrace he could see the black sheen of her fur in the sunlight. There was a robin running across the lawn, stopping, listening for a worm, and Grandma stirred and stretched and wakened, crouching quickly, with eyes fastened wickedly on the robin. Poor soul! If Haroot had not been so comfortable he would have rushed to chase Grandma, warn the unsuspecting bird. It was like himself, he thought, and Iblees was like the cat, waiting to pounce upon him.

And what would be left of him, he wondered, when Iblees was through with him? —a bunch of bones and feathers, only he didn't have feathers any more. Those gorgeous wings of his had gone with the other celestial glories, and there was no use thinking and regretting and worrying. He was in the employ of Iblees; he would simply have to do what he was ordered to do. And it had been his own fault to let himself become so involved in Benjy Bingham's purely personal problems. He had had no business really to fall in love so desperately and irrevocably with Sally, particularly when there was no slightest chance of affection in return.

He was like poor Soames in *The Forsyte Saga,* with his deep and hopeless love for Irene. Yet Sally was nicer than Irene, warmer, with more hidden fire, more strength, more humor, and not so adamant. He could imagine Sally yielding, suddenly smiling in that adorably friendly, loving way she smiled at the children, only of course it wouldn't be quite like that, there would be more excitement, more ecstasy to it. And she would hold out her hands to him and say, "Let's forget it, Benjy, and begin again," and then

he would take her tenderly in his arms.

But it didn't do to think too much of scenes like that. It made him too miserable. Better almost to wonder what Iblees wanted. But the best, the wisest way, was to take what came, to lie here on the terrace and think of nothing but the view—smooth lawn and vivid garden and lovely ruffled blue of the bay beyond.

There were four small sail-boats on the bay, and a rowboat with clam-diggers over by the opposite shore, and two small sea-sleds were whirring down toward the outer harbor. Some one was hammering something across the street. The grocer-boy was talking with Rosie at the kitchen door. He could hear the swift metallic click and ring of Miss Wrinkle's typewriter in the sewing-room above him, and the *brrrr* of Miss Jennings' sewing-machine faintly from the nursery windows. And Grandma was walking sedately up the terrace steps, with arching back and waving tail, desiring to be petted. Clear voices were near the side gate of the garden, and he saw the white hats of Alice-Anne and Timmy and Robin approaching before the portly figure of Petra.

Curious how the sound of those voices and the sight of the small brimmed hats lifted his spirit. He would be a dragon beneath the syringa bushes and leap out at them, growling. The steamer-rug would make an excellent tail. But he would give them some warning first, or Timmy might dream tonight.

"Hello, there!" he shouted, and rose with difficulty from his chair. "Look out, there might be a dragon under the bushes."

They met in the green leafy gloom of the dragon's cavern and the combat was violent and glorious, punctuated by frantic growlings, and squeals of excitement and of joy. He reared and clawed and exhaled blasts of imaginary smoke fire, and the children strove to drag him down, and beat and pummeled him until all were wound and mingled in the steamer-rug and each other, and he was on his hands and knees with the three of them riding upon his back.

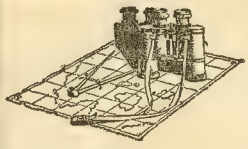
"Go easy now," he panted. "I'm a tame dragon now, like Saint George's after he'd beaten him. Don't kick my ribs, Timmy. There's Mother!"

What did it matter if Sally had come into the garden bringing a total stranger?

"Father's a dragon!" the children shouted to them happily. "A nice tame dragon!"

He reared a little, they squealed and clutched him, a stone ground into his knee, and the elderly lady with Sally looked astonished. Perhaps she had heard that Benjamin Bingham was odd. What did it matter? Nothing mattered but the joy of the children.

"Last stop, all change!" he called and



"OPERATION DYNAMITE"

By JAMES NORMAN

Davie Coster, *Inglés*, had become more Spaniard than Englishman. He even thought in Spanish. During the Civil War he had fought from Brunete to the Ebro with the *Brigadas Internacionales*—and after the German defeat in World War II he had returned to his adopted land to join the guerrilla forces which waged endless war against Franco's Falange. . . . Now the *Junta Suprema* had a mission for him as difficult as it was dangerous: A trainload of Nazi technicians, following a circuitous route through Asturias to the little port of San Esteban to take ship for South America, was to be halted by Coster. Sabotage? Nay, *hombre*. The train must be destroyed completely. *No one must escape!*

Also in the May issue: "Bluewater Bullion"—a smashing tale of undersea salvage pirates, by H. FREDRIC YOUNG. . . . A new Charley Hoe Handle story, by JIM KJELGAARD. . . . "On the Beam"—a stirring yarn of the blizzard-hopping bush pilots of Alaska, by FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE. . . . The next exciting installment of STEVE FRAZEE'S "Ghost-Mine Gold." . . . Many other fact and fiction features. . . . And of course the usual unusual departments you find only in—

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tipped then gently off his back into a wriggling heap on the grass.

He looked at Sally, and she smiled at him with friendliness. He could have shouted aloud like the children, with his happiness. And then the thought of Iblees rose in his mind, and the dread of his unknown mission, and his interview on Friday at two o'clock.

ON Friday afternoon at two o'clock, Haroot was at the offices of A. P. W. Smith and Sons on the twenty-first floor of the green and gold building near Forty-second Street. It was like any other office-building and any other office. There was a girl at a desk inside the main door, a charming blonde with ruby lips, and Haroot recognized her as the one with whom he had shared a chocolate ice-cream soda on the day that he first saw Sally.

"Is—er—is Mr. Smith in?" he asked hesitantly.

"What name, please?" she said, nor did she cease the shining of her nails as she addressed him.

"Mr. Benjamin Bingham."

"He's busy," she said, and yawned behind her hand. "He's got an appointment."

"Yes; it's with me."

She looked at him. "No, sir," she said, with assurance.

"You don't recognize me?" Haroot felt hurt. "Do you share your ice-cream sodas with every Tom, Dick and Harry that comes along?"

"Oh, my Gawd!" She was astounded. "Say, how you have changed, Haroot. I wouldn't have known you. Honestly, I wouldn't. Was that the best you could do for yourself?"

Her candor was distinctly unpleasant. He grunted.

There was a silence, then:

"Mr. Benjamin Bingham was a man of family and wealth and position. You should see my fine house down at Saltmere."

"Yes," she said, "but what a face and figure! And when I think how choosey you were. Wouldn't be this one and wouldn't be that one!" She went into snorts and giggles of mirth. "I'll tell Iblees you're here. How did your wife work out?"

"Mrs. Bingham is an exceedingly fine and unusual person." He hated to have this little whipper-snapper of a fiend even mention Sally.

"That's all right, fine and unusual is swell," she said, and went toward the door of an inner office, "but is she the kind of a wife you wanted? You don't look as if your life was all pancakes and maple syrup. Mr. Benjamin Bingham of Salt-mere is here." She had opened the door and was speaking to some unseen person.

"Let him come in." That was Iblees. The back of Haroot's knees felt shaky as he entered, but he was thankful that this time he was wearing a good suit of navy blue made by an excellent tailor, that his tan shoes were new, his necktie quiet and unassuming and his hair well brushed. It helped considerably to be decently dressed.

"Your Majesty sent for me," he said, and bowed. He didn't know whether he was expected to kneel or not, but it seemed too incongruous to go down on one knee on that green rug among so much stolid and unimaginative mahogany furniture. It was absurd enough to say, "Your Majesty," to a thin dark business-man in gray tweeds. Wouldn't it be a horrid jest if this were not Iblees after all, but really some ordinary broker. Most ghastly thought! But there was the prong of Iblees' tail, draped over the back of the chair, and beneath the desk was surely one misshapen shoe.

So Haroot felt relieved, and said, "I have come, sire."

"I see you've come," Iblees said. "I have eyes in my head."

"Sire, I wouldn't attempt to deny it," Haroot answered.

"And you needn't begin to pick me up all the time, either," Iblees said. "Can't you be quiet a few minutes and listen? What I can't see is what you ever saw in that body to attract you."

"It's an excellent body," Haroot said stiffly. "It's well made, it goes perfectly, it's scarcely worn at all."

"That may all be so, but you're no beauty, Haroot."

"I wasn't looking for beauty in myself," he said, and then wished he hadn't said it.

"Oh, ho—you were looking for beauty in some one else then." Iblees tapped his blotter with a pencil. "Seems to me I heard some rumors. That's it. It was the wife, wasn't it? You were looking for beauty in a wife, weren't you?"

Haroot was silent.

"So you got a beautiful wife, did you? I'd like to see her sometime. We might arrange a tea-party at one of the hotels. How about Wednesday?"

"I'm afraid not Wednesday, sire." The palms of Haroot's hands were clammy. This was ghastly. He had never dreamed of such a hideous possibility.

"Thursday, then?"

"Thursday's the nurse's day out, sire."

"Friday?"

"Friday she is hostess at tea at her club —it's absolutely essential for her to be there."

"And of course Saturday and Sunday I'm on a week-end party."

For a moment Iblees sat thinking. In all his life Haroot had scarcely ever been so disturbed, so apprehensive. It was unthinkable that Iblees should begin to be interested in Sally. Too horrible for contemplation. On Iblees' desk was a picture in a carved frame, dull gold, and the picture was of a young woman, beautiful, abandoned-looking. What if it were Sally's face in a frame there? Haroot was desperate.

"She's not—really, I don't think you'd find her—congenial," he said. "She's not —not at all your type, sire. I mean, there's a great deal of the Puritan in her. She's inherited it from her ancestors. They left a lot of corking good old furniture and things too. But what I mean is, she really is more or less Puritan."

"Still I found many of the Puritans far more congenial than any one imagines," Iblees said, and smiled slightly.

"Oh, I don't doubt it, sire; I don't doubt it for a minute. But what I mean is, Sally—well, Sally is rather a saint, in her way."

Iblees chuckled. "I've had a good deal of fun with the saints, too, in my time."

HAROOT thought of the kind of fun that Iblees had had with the saints, and he felt prickles of nervousness start out all over his body. It had gone far enough. He had been sitting on the edge of his chair. Now he rose, and said:

"Sire, if all you wanted me for was to discuss my wife with me, I shall ask your permission to go." He might find himself dead and in the sixth hell with all those scorpions the next minute, but it was never wise to show fear.

And Iblees laughed. "All right," he said, "we'll change the subject—for the time being. Remember that. Now what I wanted you for was this: what have been your observations as to the human race?"

"The human race?" Haroot felt as if the expression on his face resembled nothing on earth so much as a fish, completely vapid and brainless. "Oh— the human race," he repeated.

"Yes, the human race."

"Why, I think it's all right," Haroot said. "I mean, I think it's very nice. I've always liked it, found people agreeable on the whole and all that sort of thing."

Iblees snorted. "I shouldn't call that a very brilliant observation. What do you think I've been giving you all this time for? Didn't I tell you to look about?"

"I have been looking about," Haroot said. "But I didn't know you expected me to look about the whole human race, Your Majesty. That's a very large order. And I've been a sick man. That was a nasty knock on the head I got from the mast, and it's no easy jest to take on another's personality."

"I should know that, if any one ever did."

"Yes; but if you'll excuse my saying it, sire, you never try to merge yourself at all into the other personality. Your individualism is so—well, so great that it isn't necessary for you to adjust yourself. Everything else adjusts itself to me. I had to do it all myself. Why, I even had to find out that the cat's name was Grandma. I've been looking about steadily, but I haven't had time to look about outside of my own garden. But now that I know you want me to, I'll look about further and make some observations on the human race. Do you want me to write a book or something?"

"I do not," Iblees said. "There are thousands too many books now. I'll give you your final orders when you are ready for them."

"But they have something to do with the whole human race?"

"Well, naturally—what do you think I waste so much time on you for, otherwise?—I hope you haven't got all rusty in your knowledge of magic, have you?"

"No, sire, I don't think so."

"Well, brush it up a bit—brush it up. Go on home now, and keep your eyes open. Then come to me in a month and I'll see if you are ready for your final orders. Send the girl in to me as you go out, will you? Good afternoon. Now keep your eyes open."

When he found himself out on the street, Haroot felt as limp as if he had been having a tooth out. "That was horrible," he thought, "but it's early yet, I'll buy some things for Sally and the children. That will be fun!"

He had plenty of money in his pocket, and Cord's and Nailor's great shop had a toy department, he knew. Besides, you could observe the human race to great advantage while shopping. The only difficulty about that was that he was so excited about his purchases. He bought a lovely soft blue and gold brocaded boudoir wrap for Sally, and thought wistfully how he wished he might see her in it, but even if he couldn't, she would appreciate it. It had dragons on it, and she had a fondness for dragons.

As for the children's presents, he bought a most delectable set of dolls' food for Alice-Anne. There were dozens of different kinds of papier-mâché viands on small white cardboard plates, foods so shinily painted, so delicious, so succulent looking as to make one's mouth water.

There were inch-long fish, curled, with their tails in their mouths, and green dots of parsley painted upon their blue backs. They reposed in beds of jelly that was so real it almost seemed to quiver when admired. There was a fat brown-roasted turkey, and he would have been more attractive had they not forgotten to garnish him also with parsley. There was a tiny steak, for dolls who liked theirs very rare indeed. There was a plate of peas the size of pinheads. There were potatoes and onions and beautiful, vivid apples and oranges the size of real peas. There was a chocolate cake with a slice cut from it, and a jellied pudding that was a delight to the eye.

Haroot was entranced with the dishes. He kept saying to the salesgirl, "Oh, I say, look at this one; this is the best of the lot—" He could see Alice-Anne's dolls having the most gorgeous dinner-party in her dolls' house dining-room.

It is true that as he remembered it, the furniture was too large for the room and the dolls were too large for the furniture, besides being quite unequipped with joints necessary for a seated position. But they always wore the most amiable expressions—even when the bath-tub turned up under the dining-room table, in the midst of a party—and he was sure they could stand propped against chairs with the greatest of comfort and simply revel in the fish and the roast and the peas and the pudding and the cake.

He decided to carry the packages home, and he bought two woolly cats for Timmy and Robin, and carried them, and he always had a large box containing Sally's blue dragon wrapper.

He looked like Santa Claus as he went out of the store, and he was so delighted with his purchases that it was not until he was rushing through the Grand Central Station, dodging porters with difficulty, that he realized he had been too busy to make any observations upon the human race. He had gathered the vague impression that the store was filled with pleasant, well-dressed-looking people and that the salesgirl who had waited on him would have been far more comfortable in shoes with lower heels. But that wasn't the sort of observation that Iblees wanted. He wanted things more fundamental and searching than that.

Well, Haroot had a month of grace before him. He would keep his eyes open but he could have a pleasant time, too, and perhaps he could prevail upon Sally to be more friendly. He put his packages in the rack above his head and settled down in the car-seat. It was one of the old green plush ones that you can lean the back of your head against. Insanitary but comfortable. He would be back in good time for dinner, and he had heard Sally ordering steak and mushrooms that morning. It would be delightful to get home.

HAROOT was beginning to enjoy himself. The first strain of adjustment was over and he no longer felt tense with dread of making some disastrous mistake that would land him in the psychopathic ward of Bellevue. He could find his way around fairly well alone through Benjy's mental paths, yet he felt that his own personality was beginning to get the upper hand over Benjy's appetites and failings. There had been, it must be admitted, two occasions at night when Benjy's tongue and throat and whole conscious being had yearned so vehemently and persistently for the taste of alcohol that Haroot had slipped out of bed and down to the cellar and back again with that which Benjy's body demanded. And the next morning Haroot had slept late, and the bottle had had to go down with the waste-basket and Sally had been so aloof and cool and disapproving that Haroot,

The Valkyr suddenly drew up her horse within a few feet of his balcony.

at lunch, could have howled aloud with the gnawings of remorse.

And there had been times, too, when he had so longed for the delight of those delicious French pastries and special dishes at the table which he had with Spartan endurance discontinued, that his desire was scarcely to be borne, and drove him to the purchase of large boxes of rich dark-brown candies. But even those it was impossible to conceal, for Sally found them when she put away his laundry, and he felt a fool, and inwardly cursed the weak, spoiled body of Benjy. How could any woman love a man who hid boxes of chocolates among his handkerchiefs and collars? It was despicable.

To expiate such lapses Haroot took to a system of rigorous training. He did setting-up exercises every morning. He limited himself to one spoonful of sugar on his porridge. He often refused the simplest desserts. And when he weighed himself, draped in a lavender-edged and embroidered towel, he was delighted to find that he was losing flesh.

As for his observations on the human race, he did all that he could in his own household; but that was not very repaying, so he suggested to Sally, one evening, that now that he was feeling better they might begin to get out a bit. They were having dessert at dinner and the room was cool and pleasant with mahogany and silver and shadowy candle-light.

"I'd like to see more people," he said. "Look about and make—I mean, look about."

"Certainly," she said. "I think it's a good idea if you feel able now. We might ask some people to dinner on the fifteenth."

But the thought of a dinner alarmed him. "Let's make it a tea first," he suggested. "You don't have to be so clever at a tea. I don't feel up to being very clever yet."

She smiled, only the beginning of a smile, and he burst out, "You don't think I ever was clever, do you? Well, let me tell you that more than once I've made the whole crowd laugh at Cecelia's Sunday-afternoon teas."

"Cecelia's?"

He realized what a colossal mistake he had made, but he stuck to it doggedly. Hang it all, he couldn't always be lying.

"Yes, Saint Cecelia's. She gave tea-parties every Sunday afternoon, very special they were, too, with the most gorgeous music of course. Her husband is charming. You'd like them, Sally."

She looked at him quizzically. Evidently she thought he was trying to pull the wool over her eyes by being ridiculous.

"I didn't know that Saint Cecelia had a husband," she said.

"Oh, yes; an awfully nice chap. Valerian. But he never would remember to pass things. She was always at him to see that people had cakes enough."

"When was all this, Benjy?" Sally peeled a grape carefully and ate it.

"In a past existence." His tones were grim and he made her look at him. "I know exactly what you are thinking of me, my dear. I'm not quite the unobservant fool you think me."

"I don't mean to be disagreeable to you, Benjy," she said honestly. "Are you unhappy?"

"Well, this isn't the most ideal way to live I can imagine."

"It's the only way for us," she said with finality. "We'll not discuss it."

"But we must," he insisted. "You never will—you shut up like an oyster when we get on to any serious ground. We'll have to—"

"Benjy, if you go on like that I shall go up to my room and write to Aunt Anne all the rest of the evening."

"Oh, very well," he said, defeated. "I won't go on like that, then. We'll talk about the weather, if you'd rather. No, I'm being rather beastly, Sally. I'm sorry. But it isn't easy. Perhaps I'll get used to it—however. Let's have that tea and go around more. I've got to make some observations on the human race."

"Why, are you going to write a book?" she asked, and rose from the table.

"Only the devil knows what I'm going to do." He felt depressed and miserable and hated the whole human race.

BUT even more than he hated the human race, he hated Iblees. That interest in Sally and the desire to have tea with her some day was ominous; that is, unless he could be diverted. The mere consideration of Iblees having any curiosity in regard to Sally was the sort of thought one pushes from one's mind, securely locking the door upon it and praying that the locks will hold. Now, as Haroot and Sally sat on the terrace after dinner, it seemed unreal and preposterous that intangible evils menaced them. There was the house behind them with its kindly

old white walls. There was the moon above the pine tree; there were fireflies dancing above the lawn, and there was a soft wind with the breath of pine and flowers.

One of the maids was singing *Mavourneen* quite charmingly as she washed the dishes in the pantry; and there was a purring sound at Haroot's feet and he felt a rubbing against his ankle and there was Grandma, her eyes green in the dusk. He lifted her by the nape of her neck and she hung limp, then settled happily in his lap as he smoothed her. Her paws flexed against his leg and the claws bit through.

"Hi, Grandma, stop it, you're scratching me," he said, and Sally chuckled.

"We had a kitten named that when we were children."

"An excellent name," he said.

For a moment there was peace between him and Sally, and something—almost more than peace—a serene companionship. For once his presence did not dim that fire that burned within her. At the moment he could almost feel the warmth of it, as from quiet embers. If only sometimes he might fan it into something more.

He had never seen a woman he so admired or whose approval he desired with such sincerity. Nor had he ever seen a woman who stirred him so. If she would, they could be such friends, and merge their friendship into love. The materials for building a life of beauty were within their reach. But mingled with her fineness and her beauty was a streak of stubbornness and of New England coldness.

"Didn't one of your New England sea-captain ancestors ever bring back a Spanish wife?" he asked her.

"Where did you hear that tale?" she said, and he thought she was startled.

"Oh, I don't know." He must go warily. "A bit of Spanish blood would be excellent in a New England constitution, a splash of red in the general gray."

"There was some such tale," she admitted. "But it was very far back and I think the family was always rather ashamed of it. I have a gorgeous old shawl and a great comb, a tortoise-shell with some turquoise and garnets."

"It's a valuable inheritance," he said, and was amused to realize how his spirits had risen. "Don't trifle it. And I wouldn't be ashamed of anything that adds to the vividness of life. Do you know, I have an idea? Perhaps that's the reason for devils. If you had only saints it would be rather dull—like a piece of cloth all pale blue and silver. Cecelia had a cloak sort of thing that was blue and silver, pretty but insipid. And as a matter of fact there wouldn't have been any saints if it were not for the devils who created evil for them to fight against, and sufferings and martyrdoms, although a lot of that was pure hysteria—

"Here, Grandma, don't bite me." The kitten had taken his finger in her mouth, and her teeth nearly pierced the skin.

"You've evolved the most curious theories about saints and devils lately," Sally said.

"Well, they're quite interesting. It's fun to speculate about them. But I must spend more time and thought on the human race, really. I suppose I'd better begin reading more newspapers and magazines."

"Of course I've always wanted you to take some interest in politics. There's so much to be done. The roads, for instance. The Old Stone Hill Road is a disgrace."

"I don't believe I could afford politics."

"You might be able to afford the time for it—and the interest." There crept into her tone an edge of exasperation, and he hastened to turn it from him.

"Of course I could do that," he said. "But I still think I'd be a duffer at it. How about that tea, Sally? Who will you ask to it? The people who were at the Blakes' the other Sunday?"

"I'd much rather have a dinner instead, if you feel up to it," she said. "We owe the Blakes and the Van Schenks one, and I'll have to ask the Vanes."

"Oh, that lemon-yellow woman? Well, perhaps a dinner is more fun than tea."

"Did you like Mrs. Vane?"

"Yes; she was very amusing. Let's not have the dinner on a Tuesday or a Thursday."

"I naturally wouldn't. Tuesdays Miss Jennings comes, and Thursdays Petra and Rosie go out. But why?"

He realized, uncomfortably, that he could not very well explain why, and wished that he had not mentioned Tuesday or Thursday at all. "Oh," he said, "it was just a foolish feeling, an aversion, I mean. I think those are unlucky days for parties. Like spilling salt or walking under ladders or seeing one black crow on a blasted oak-tree."

Sally snorted, and he felt unhappy. He

had not been exactly truthful and he had given the impression of having more to conceal than he really had. But how could he have repeated the whole conversation to Sally? He sighed and said, "There's a fog coming in."

"Yes! it's getting chilly and it's after ten. I'm going up. Good-night, Benjy."

"Good-night."

Wind blew more coldly from the bay and white wisps of fog began creeping through the trees and bushes of the garden. Across the water came the faint clang of a buoy's bell softened through darkness. Haroot dumped the kitten gently from his lap and rose. He, too, might as well go up to bed.

THE dinner was on a Friday night, and the Blakes and the Van Schenks and the Vanes were to come, and they were to play bridge afterward. Haroot was more than thankful that it would not be necessary for him to rely upon Benjy's thought-roads for bridge. All spirits who spend a few weeks in the lower regions learn a great deal about cards. It is one of the chief traditions of the place. And Haroot had been unusually good at both bridge and pinochle. Still, even though he had nothing to worry about on the score of cards, he was very nervous, and to make matters worse he discovered at the last minute that his dinner jacket fairly wrinkled in ripples upon him.

He rushed into Sally's room. She was just in the act of slipping a cool green chiffon dress over her head, and emerging from it.

"Oh, I say," he said, forgetting his own troubles, "you're just like Sabrina, Sally—'Under the glassy cool translucent wave.' I never saw anybody as beautiful as you are, coming out of that green stuff."

"I'm not coming out of it. I'm going in to it." But she laughed and asked him to fasten a snapper for her, and he felt as elated as if he had been allowed to cast his best overcoat in the mud to make safe passage for her feet.

"There, is that all right?" he said. "I just came in because my jacket doesn't fit at all. It looks like sin, Sally. You see I have lost since I took to dieting. I say, what'll I do about it? I feel like a fool."

"You can't do anything about it," she said. "You can't very well get another suit in the next ten minutes. Come on, Benjy—stop fussing about it. They'll be here right away."

"All right, I will. But I'll have to give my shoes a bit of a brush. And I want to say good-night to the children. I won't be a minute."

"Please hurry. Remember you have to fix the cocktails."

He felt that he could safely trust to Benjy's thought paths to do that. And, anyway, Rosie was beside him in the pantry, helping him with the vermouth and gin, so all went well. The few minutes in the living-room before they went in to dinner went off easily, too. He passed his cocktails and was cornered by Mrs. Blake, who was terribly concerned about a fight her Scotch terrrier had just been engaged in. He sympathized with her, and watched Olga Vane and Sally. Olga was in a magenta dress, or at least one of the color of her lips, and the Spanish shawl about her was black, covered with vivid roses the size of soup plates. Sally was exquisite beside her.

"Yes," Haroot said, "the only safe way to stop a dog fight is to throw water on them."

Rosie, in immaculate black and white, appeared at the door and they went into the dining-room.

"My eye!" Haroot thought. "It's delightful."

There was an embroidered lacy cloth upon the table and on that, silver, and green glass the color of Sally's gown. A shallow green bowl in the center held water-lilies, and four tall creamy candles were lighted, and the flames swayed gently and were reflected in the silver and the glass. The door was open to the terrace, and the garden was lovely with long shadows and a glow of sunset.

There was a smell of roses and warm grass, and the sound of a thrush, singing. They ate, from tall green sherbert glasses, small icy balls of melons, green balls and creamy balls and amber ones, and pink. And Haroot, tasting the delicious cool things with enjoyment, could not take his eyes from Sally, but he knew that he must turn and give his attention and all the wit he was possessed of to Olga Vane, who was at his side.

"Don't you like these melon things?" he said to her, and she said:

"They are like tasting colors. Are you going to tell me about your fiends tonight?"

"It's the wrong day," he said. "I hoped perhaps you would tell me about the book you are writing."

"How did you know about it?"

"I could tell, of course, the minute I looked at you."

She rested her elbows on the table and put her chin on the back of her clasped fingers. Very long white hands she had, with the nails polished almost to the shade of her lips and dress.

"I'm having the devil of a time with my heroine," she said. "You see, she's in love with another man."

"Not her husband?"

"Of course not."

"It's funny," Haroot said, "people in books never are in love with their husbands or wives, not by any chance. What's your woman going to do?"

"That's the point—what is she? You see, I don't really know. You see, in order to write you have to live, I mean you have to experience it in the Dewey sense."

"Good grief, what do you mean by that? 'The gentle dew from heaven'—no, it was rain, wasn't it? But what do you mean?"

"Dewey is a very great philosopher—modern."

"Sorry; I didn't know. But do you mean that before you can go on with your heroine you have to throw yourself into a romantic situation with some other man, just to see what it's like?"

"Why not?" she said. "'Live dangerously.'"

"I say, Benjy," the Van Schenk man spoke from across the table. "How is your ice-box working? We have a new one. It's a knockout."

ROSIE was at Haroot's elbow, passing succulent small green peas in a silver dish, and Mr. Blake began to recount to Olga Vane a long tale about how a traffic officer held him up for no reason whatever, and what the officer did, cowing him completely in the end. The dinner was proceeding in a pleasant, leisurely manner. Mrs. Blake had been repeating the tale of the dog-fight to Mr. Vane, and he was telling stories of all the dog-fights he had witnessed and nobly separated. Billy Van Schenk and Sally were discussing ice-boxes, and Mabel Van Schenk, on Haroot's left, told him all about a long letter she had received that morning from David, who appeared to be her son, at a summer camp.

Then Mr. Blake began to tell humorous stories, not exactly the newest of the new, perhaps, but still amusing, and Olga Vane told one about a bishop that made Sally's spine stiffen. Haroot was aware of its stiffening, even at the length of the table, even though she laughed courteously. But she shifted the conversation adroitly from bishops to peony roots and the table was swept into heated discussion of gardens and plans for planting. But Olga ate her salad dreamily, and suddenly turned to Haroot and said:

"I feel that I have known you very well before. We are long past formalities, you know. I felt the minute that I saw you, that there was some close bond between us. Perhaps—" her tone was very low and silky—"perhaps I was your wife in some past existence."

"But you weren't," he said. "She wasn't in the least like you. She was quite fat—in fact, very fat—and she carried baskets on her head and kept pigs. Well, I say she was my wife; she wasn't really.

Her husband was a basketmaker, but I always think of her as—"

He realized, to his consternation, what he was saying and although it was unheard by the rest of the people—they were arguing about where to buy small pines for fall planting—he was horrified at his indiscretion, and hastily said, "Now you,

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I think, must have been some dancer in a pagan temple in a past existence. I can imagine you curving about between great pillars, with red sacrificial fires before a stone god—one of those huge, impassive ones, you know—or else a king, perhaps. A real king, I mean. He'd be most tremendously keen about you."

"What's all this about kings and gods and sacrificial fires that you're getting off, Benjy?" Mr. Blake shouted at him. "I say, what's come over Benjy, Sally?"

"He's developing a poetical streak, aren't you, Benjy?" Mabel Van Schenk said, and her husband hooted:

"Benjy the poet! That's a good one, that is. That's Benjy's new line since he was bashed on the head with the mast."

They all laughed at him, but kindly, and Haroot was glad to amuse them. But Olga glowered and under her breath said, "Philistines."

He didn't know what she meant exactly, but it annoyed him to have his guests criticized, for he liked them; so he said to her:

"Oh, don't know, I think it's perfectly reasonable to talk about how to fertilize cedar trees, if you want to. I mean, why is it any more noble and less Philistine to talk about sacrificial fires and gods and things like that?"

"Don't you want color in your life?"

He remembered a conversation he had had with Sally on that subject. "But you have to temper the talk to the shorn woman," he thought, and said:

"Color is all very well, but I don't want an absolute riot of it. I don't want life to be all orange and scarlet and magenta, you know."

"I do. I want a blare of it, like trumpets."

"You'd get awfully sick of trumpets blaring in your ears all the time."

"Not I, Mr. Bingham."

"Oh, trumpets—" Mabel Van Schenk leaned toward Haroot and joined in the conversation. "Do you know anything about trumpets, Mrs. Vane? My boy, he's at camp on Lake Minnewaska, and he had been simply beseeching me to send him a boy scout trumpet. But it seems to me that he'd have to have some instruction before he could possibly play any brass instrument; don't you think so? And I've heard that they change the shape of the mouth."

They discussed the shape of Mabel Van Schenk's boy's mouth, and the probable effect upon it of trumpets; and the alligator-pear salad-plates were removed, and Rosie and the extra maid went quietly about the table, and cigarettes were passed and smoke coiled peacefully about the room.

Outside of the long door that opened on the terrace, the garden was blue with dusk. White phlox flowers in the border seemed leaning forward to look up toward the house, and among them and the green of foliage were pink streaks and yellow, of the tall snapdragons that Sally loved. There was a faint pale mist upon the garden, and crickets chirred, and suddenly the small black kitten wandered in the door, with waving tail.

Laughter greeted it and Haroot rose and took it by the nape of its neck, and went out into the garden and dropped it beneath the lilac bushes.

"Shoo now, Grandma," he said. "Go chase the Blakes' dog." He wished that he might stay out in the garden and that Sally would come and walk up and down the paths with him, quietly and happily. For the moment he was reluctant to go back to the room full of people—to Olga Vane. She was a disturbing person. Far too exciting, with an uncomfortable razor-edged sort of mind, and yet she was rather a fool. But fools, when they are beautiful, and wish to make themselves seductive are apt to be successful. There is something about a blare of trumpets, even a discordant blare, that makes one want to follow. "But Sally," Haroot thought, "is like a fine clear bell."

FROM the lighted oblong of the door came laughter and a sense of vivid gayety, and he saw the white arms and backs of women, and the black suits of the men. The maids were passing something, and he must go in. But he would make Olga Vane talk about ice-boxes or furnaces. He was afraid of the spell of her speech.

He need not have been afraid then, though, for Sally had gathered up the various double threads of conversation and woven them into a general discussion of the newest plays and books. They ate small cakes and a *mousse* whose flavor was too subtle for Haroot to determine; and Mrs. Van Schenk thought that Sinclair Lewis' latest book was not up to his others.

Olga Vane said very little but looked superior, and did remark that the only people who really thought, in America, were

the critics and they had to think for the rest of the country. Nobody was able to form an opinion of his own about a book or play until he knew what the critics thought about it. And the general public hadn't even wit enough to choose its own books, but belonged to these monthly clubs who decided what was good for them to read and handed out their books to them, like children. It was a sickening state of affairs.

Then the dinner was finished, and Sally and the women went into the living-room, and the men sat about the table and drank coffee and discussed the state of American Radio and Amalgamated Copper and something or other else Preferred. And Haroot, having no tips or inside information, sat and watched the smoke of his cigarette drift toward the open doorway, and listened to the men, and the further murmur and laughter of the voices of the women, and wondered what they were talking about, and wondered what he was to do with Olga Vane.

It seemed a long time before he could suitably suggest going into the other room, and when he did so, and stood aside for his guests, Mr. Blake tripped over something—the kitten again. Again Haroot took it by the scruff of its neck and went down the steps of the terrace. And now the garden was quite dark.

As he had half expected, Olga came to him and they stood for a moment beneath the pine tree looking at the path of moonlight on the bay.

"Do you know," she said, "I've been thinking about you? You aren't getting half out of life that you should be getting."

"I wonder."

"This little two-for-a-cent suburban existence—"

"I rather imagine that you find in it just what you are looking for."

"I am looking for something—something that is great and vital. I think," her voice dropped, "that I have found it. We're far past the preliminaries, you know."

"We are," he said. "There never were any with us." For a second he said nothing more. Then he went on, "I'm sorry I can't see this garden well—the colors in it, I mean. It's a good garden. Sally has one rule about it. She simply will not allow any flower in it that is the color of magenta. Not one. If any one crops up we have to root it out and throw it over into the weed heap. Perfectly ruthlessly."

"Magenta?" she said.

"Yes, magenta."

"And do you always do what Sally wishes, Benjy Bingham?"

"I try to," he said. "You see, I really love her."

"Of course then I must respect the rules of your garden."

"It would be better. I'm sorry. But I don't think you've really found what you were looking for."

"Perhaps I haven't," she said. "I think I was mistaken."

"I'm sorry," he said, and he felt a sadness, and yet a great relief. "I do hope you find what you're looking for. I rather imagine that Sally would like to have us come in for bridge."

He was astonished to see how badly she played bridge. You would have thought that a woman of her type would do it better. But in spite of it, he was able to come out ahead of Mrs. Blake and the Van Schenk man, and they said that they had never seen him play so well.

CHAPTER V

FOR the next two weeks he tried to obey Iblees' instructions to keep his eyes open and look about him. This he did but, he felt, with very poor success. He was waiting in the car, one afternoon, for Sally to come out of a friend's house from a bridge party, and as he waited he saw the misty shape of a demon that wafted itself out of a drain-pipe by the side of the road, took shape and draped itself against the side of his car.

"How's things?" it asked genially, and he said:

"Rotten. Why have you all deserted me?"

"They all say you've gotten too high-hat with your house at Salt-mere and your name in the Social Register and all."

"That's nonsense," Haroot said. "It's perfectly all right for me to want my name in the Social Register. I achieved the Koran, now why not this? It's logical."

"Oh, sure, have it your own way," the demon said, "I never objected, only some of them were sore."

"Well, I must say I'd like a little help or advice now and then," Haroot said. "Now here I don't know what sort of things Iblees wants me to observe. What's it all about, anyway? The girls all powder their noses and prices are higher and higher all the time—"

"Everybody knows that, even in the very lower regions."

"Well, what should I look into? The state of morals and manners of humanity, I suppose. I wish I could find some one who knows something about it."

"I'll see what I can do for you," the demon said. "So long."

He wafted off, and Sally came out of the house.

* * *

The next day it was raining, pouring, flooding down in driving lines of rain. Rosie's aunt had died and Rosie had to go to the funeral, and to go to the funeral it was necessary to make complicated and difficult connections and be driven to the North Kingston Station, twelve miles away across the Old Stone Hill Road and the stretch of moors. Sally was going to drive her, but when she came downstairs in shiny black raincoat and southwester, Haroot rose from his chair by the fire and said:

"Why didn't you tell me you were going out? This is no day for a woman to be driving around alone. I'm going. You sit here and read."

She protested, but he thought she seemed pleased at his ordering her about so arbitrarily.

Out in the hall Rosie waited, her face swathed in a black veil, beneath which she sniffed and mopped her eyes and nose, and strove to dab on powder, and became involved in the clinging lengths of fabric. Timmy and Robin and Alice-Anne hurled themselves down the stairs just as Haroot was putting on his rubbers. The children wound themselves about him with lamentations that he was leaving them. They wanted him to come up and play Noah's Ark with them in the nursery. They had a wonderful ark built of chairs and steamer-rugs, and he was cast for the rôle of the two jaguars. He was nearly felled to the floor when Sally came from the living-room and subdued his assailants.

"The rear left wheel seems a bit wobbly, Benjy," she said. "Perhaps you'd better have them look at it in the garage at North Kingston."

"All right," he said. "Ready, Rosie?"

It was a much worse rain than he had thought.

* * *

It was not till Haroot was driving home again that he remembered he should have had the left rear wheel looked at in the garage in North Kingston. There was a squeak that began to intrude into his consciousness, a swift persistent rhythmic squeak that would not be denied. He was, at the time, ascending the Old Stone Hill Road, grinding up in low, for nothing could take that grade in high. His windshield was drenched and misty, except where the wiper cleared its arc. A gray and shifting veil of rain hung over fields and woods, and bushes by the roadside were bent low with the weight of water dripping from their leaves. Small red streams and runnels coursed down the road with froth and twigs and tumbling pebbles, and the air was filled with the smell of rain and the sound of it, and the rush of distant streams and a rising of the wind.

The car struggled to the top of the hill, coughing with relief as it reached the level. There was the pleasant smell of woodsmoke, and Haroot noticed a low gray farmhouse with lilac bushes and three depressed hens, and a child's doll-carriage drenched in the front yard beyond a broken fence. But smoke rose from its chimney, and he wished he were inside by the fire.

It was dull, alone in the car, and he had come out on the road across the moors, where for miles one saw nothing but scrub oak and cat-brier and blueberry bushes, with a gray haze far beyond, that was the sea. It was a straight road, tempting to speeders. He pressed down the gas, heard the ominous squeak, slowed down, jerked over a stone, felt a twist, a downward sagging, tilted backward and sideways, and stopped. Ahead a lone wheel trundled on absurdly, decided to forsake the road, turned right toward the ditch and disappeared from view.

"Here's a nice mess," Haroot thought. "Why didn't I do what Sally told me to?" There was nothing for it but to walk back to the farmhouse and telephone for help.

It was the sort of rain you hate to walk in. It leaps savagely up at you from the ground. It finds its way in your neck and soon small streams are running down inside your collar. It soaks your ankles, your shins, your shoulders, and stings your face and strives to keep you from opening your eyes.

IT SEEMED miles to Haroot back to the farmhouse, and when he got there the woman within was suspicious and reluctant to let him telephone. She per-

mitted him, finally, and as he stepped in he glimpsed in the kitchen a surly man with a bandaged foot on a table, a damp dog by the stove, a small girl with straw-colored hair over her eyes like a terrier's. She stared at him, finger in mouth, while he telephoned in the parlor, and the woman of the house stood by, evidently fearing that he would make off with some valued possession—a conch-shell from the mantel, perhaps, or a china cat from the table.

He could scarcely have taken the carpet or the red plush sofas or the crayon portraits or the lamp. The whole house was so full of an atmosphere of stuffiness, suspicion and frying onions that he was glad enough to pay his quarter for the call and find himself out in the cold rain again, making for his car. And, in the distance coming toward him, he saw another figure walking down the road.

At first he thought it was a woman, for he saw skirts, but they puzzled him, since they were longer than any woman's skirts today, unless it were a very old woman, and this person was too tall to be an old woman, and too vigorous and erect. As it drew nearer he saw that it was a man, an old man, with a beard, wearing, curiously, a long robe and having long white hair soaked with the rain. Drops ran down his long nose and hung there, uncomfortably, before he became aware of them and shook them off.

Haroot was exceedingly surprised by the old man's appearance and thought he must be some eccentric from a religious or health camp along the coast somewhere, although he had never heard that any such settlement existed. He would have passed, with a courteous nod, had the old man not held up his hand as he approached him.

"Would you kindly tell me how far it is to Salt-mere?" he asked, and Haroot stopped and said:

"It must be six miles or more, and you are walking in the wrong direction. I—I'm bound there myself, but a wheel has come off my car so I have to wait until they send out from the garage to fix me up. But if you're in no hurry I'd be glad to take you along." That was a fictitious bit of politeness, for Haroot would not be glad at all to have such a curious-looking being in the car with him. He hoped ardently that the old man would say he was in a hurry, and go on.

"Thank you so much; I should be delighted," the man said. "Was that your car I passed just now? Shall we walk back to it?"

"We'd better, I think," Haroot answered. "It is at least dry inside."

"I have known worse storms," the old man said.

"Oh, yes, more wind. And tropic rains are very bad. I remember one storm in Cairo. It rained steadily for ten days—quite unheard of. And some of the small houses on the bank of the Nile were washed away. I had a friend who climbed to her roof with a pig and four chickens—hens they were. She had a hard time with them."

"I can well believe it." The old man adroitly licked a drop of rain off his nose. "Animals are a great responsibility in time of flood, in fact a great trial. I remember my own experience. Of course the Ark was not large enough, even though I did follow divine instruction. It *was* too small. My wife was right."

"Oh, so you are Noah, then?" Haroot asked, and felt a glow of excitement. He had always heard of the patriarch who was quite a celebrity in the celestial regions, but he had never met him, even at one of Cecelia's Sunday afternoons.

"Of course I'm Noah. You didn't think I was Shem or Ham, did you?"

"Oh, no—but, you see, I wasn't expecting to meet you."

"No, I suppose not. But I always say, 'How small the world is.' You never know who you'll meet next. I've heard of you. In fact a young fiend told me this morning that I should probably run across you."

"Well, I'm delighted," Haroot said. "No, the handle turns this way. Let me help you in, sir; your robe catches." He helped hoist Noah into the car, then followed him in. It was too bad that they were so wet. They would soak the upholstery, and Sally would not like it. Still, it couldn't be helped. They could not stand in the rain just to save the cushions. "Are you comfortable?" Haroot asked. "How about a cigarette?"

"Thank you, it would be a pleasure."

"Now do tell me," Haroot said, "what brings you here?"

"I'm getting material for lectures," Noah said. "There are literally thousands of beings who know nothing about America at all. It's a most fertile field for lecturing. Think of all the people who lived and died before Columbus! Myriads of them—the

Assyrians and the Babylonians and the Persians and the Ancient Greeks and even the Early Romans, to say nothing of our own Early Hebrews and Israelites. It was Moses who suggested it to me. We've always been pioneers, and he couldn't leave just now, but he suggested that I make a quick trip through the country and come back and lecture on what I'd seen. 'Beautiful America' would be a good title. Don't you think so?"

"Excellent!" Haroot said. "And I'm sure the celestial beings would flock to hear you. All of Cecelia's set would love it if you were near enough. The distances are so great."

"Yes; that's the trouble," Noah admitted, and they smoked a moment or two in silence, while the rain poured and streamed about them and a small wet bird, foolishly out for dinner, lighted on their radiator-cap, shook itself and flew away.

"What sort of things have you found out about the country?" Haroot asked.

From the folds of his robe Noah produced some slate-like tablets, not quite as large as those with which Moses is usually depicted, but large enough to be cumbersome to carry about. Attached to them by a leather thong was a sliver of slate which was obviously his pencil. The tablets he held off at arm's length, and squinted up his eyes and read:

"'The American people are the worst housekeepers in the world.'"

"How can you say that?" Haroot asked, and thought of Sally's immaculate linen-closet.

"Look at their back yards in the cities, and their vacant lots and their dump-heaps all over rusted parts of automobiles and barrel-hoops and tin cans and papers."

"But that's not housekeeping. Have you ever visited in one of their houses?"

"It's not necessary. I can use my brains. If a person's back yard is untidy, he is an untidy person and has an untidy house. Therefore, they are the worst housekeepers in the world. And all Americans wear tortoise-shell rimmed glasses."

"They're not tortoise-shell; they're celluloid," Haroot said. "And they don't all, anyway."

"PARDON me," Noah said, "I am here on a tour of observation, so I know. They also think of nothing but money and spend more on chewing-gum than on battleships and more on cosmetics than religion. It isn't safe to walk the streets of Chicago, for all the inhabitants go armed with revolvers with which they shoot at all Englishmen."

"But have you ever been in Chicago?" Haroot asked.

"No; but I have certainly read the papers." And Noah went on with his notes without a pause. "'They can't live without ice-water, their luxury and morals rival those of ancient Rome. They have abandoned their religion. They soak themselves in the forbidden and degenerating influence of the liquid of the vine. The emissaries of the evil one walk their streets by night and day. The sound of ribald laughter and music bursts from their houses without surcease or rest. They have sold their very souls and bodies to Satan, and disaster will fall upon them. Even as before I prophesied disaster to an unbelieving world, so now I foretell ruin to that sad land of which I speak.' That's a pretty good end, don't you think?" He looked with complacent pride at Haroot, who sat, quite astonished, in the corner of his seat.

"That's one way of looking at it," Haroot admitted. "But isn't it pretty extreme?" He thought it scarcely consistent of Noah to make such a point of people soaking themselves in the degrading influences of the liquid of the vine when he himself was certainly not above reproach in that respect. The daughters of Noah, at least, might be amused at his taking such a high moral stand on that point. "If I were you I'd go into things more deeply before I gave lectures on America. How long have you been here?"

"About a week. And I was tremendously impressed by the tall buildings, and the police, and the traffic crush."

"Yes, that's the sort of thing everybody is impressed by."

"Then it's the sort of thing everybody wants to hear."

"Perhaps you're right." For some reason Haroot felt depressed. Perhaps it was the rain, or being cooped up in the car for so long, or perhaps it was Noah's personality. It would have been trying to be mewed up in the Ark with him for forty days and forty nights.

"A familiar prospect," Noah said, with satisfaction. "After all, there is nothing so restful to the spirit as a good rainy day."

"I prefer sunshine," Haroot said. To him there was nothing agreeable in the view beyond the drenched car windows. The moors stretched out like a vast green

sponge. If you were large enough you could pick up great gobs of moor and squeeze them, and water would drop streaming out, like Niagara Falls. If you were a giant, standing with white naked limbs, with your head in the gray clouds and your feet squelching in yellowish red mud, you would pick up a bit of the moor and use it for a sponge. But even at that, Haroot thought, your skin would scarcely be tough enough to endure the cat-brier. It would be a poor sort of sponge after all. He wished that Noah's robe were not dyed with such unpleasant smelling stuff. It was very close in the car, and he realized that he should have telephoned Sally what was keeping him. "What were you going to do in Salt-mere?" he asked.

"I wanted to look around and make notes on a typical American summer community."

"But I don't think Salt-mere is typical." It was curious what a contradictory mood Noah aroused in him. No wonder the patriarch had been unable to persuade people about the flood in the old days, if that were the effect he had upon everybody. You didn't believe in, or approve of, or agree with, a word he said. And a discouraging thought occurred to Haroot that perhaps he should invite the old man to the house for the night. No one would be able to see him. After death, of course, all spirits are invisible. He could sleep on the divan in the sewing-room. But what a bother! He had seldom met anyone whose presence annoyed him as did Noah's. And yet in decency he had to invite the old man.

"I say," he said, "will you come on home with me and spend the night?"

"Why, how delightful—do you really mean it? Are you sure I won't discommode you?" The old soul was so excited his hands trembled—yellowish, gnarled hands, pathetic in their clutching eagerness.

"Plenty of room—delighted to have you." Haroot was glad he had asked him. Age was another one of those things you wanted to push from your mind and lock the door on. "Look ahead there; isn't that a wrecking-car coming?"

"I believe it is. What kind of a car is this? Mr. —er—"

"Bingham, Benjamin Bingham."

"Mr.—er—Bingham."

"It's a Fuller Eight Coupé. What are you writing?"

"Just a note for my lecture. 'The left rear wheels of all Fuller Eight Coupé cars are weak and liable to come off on muddy roads.'"

"But they're *not!*" Haroot objected.

"Isn't this an example?" Noah said.

Haroot could not argue, for the wrecking-car drove up and two youths, with yellow slickers and oil-grimed faces, jumped out. He opened the door and joined them in the rain.

NOAH WAS a better guest than Haroot had anticipated. The old man was so impressed by the house and furniture and modern equipment that his aggressiveness receded and gave place to an almost childish curiosity. The bathrooms, in particular, fascinated him so that he could scarcely be persuaded out of them. He was an amusing sight, standing by the wash-stand basin, in his long robe of striped maroon and mustard-color, turning the faucets on and off and playing with the plug of the outlet with the greatest of naïve delight.

"Will you come down to dinner?" Haroot said. He hung his towel on the rack, and then realized that it was not folded. An untidy towel was an abomination to Sally. "You could sit in one of the chairs against the dining-room wall while we're eating. I couldn't talk to you, you know, because my wife wouldn't understand." He folded the towel carefully and hung it on the rack, with the embroidered S. B. to the front as it should be. He did hope that sometime, by remembering and doing all the little things that Sally liked, he might persuade her to be a little fond of him. "How about dinner?" he asked Noah. "Look out there, if you put your hand so close under the faucet the water will spray out all over the place."

"So it does." And it did. Haroot mopped drops from the front of his jacket and Noah beamed. "Thank you, if you don't mind I think I shall remain upstairs. The chairs against the dining-room wall looked valuable but uncomfortable. I think I shall examine these a few minutes more and then retire to my couch, and work on my lecture-notes. Certainly Rome nor Babylonia knew no luxury to compare to this. Decadent, decadent. Jehovah will withdraw his bow from the sky and send another flood. I advise you to start building an ark in your back yard at once, young man—I can furnish you with all the plans and specifications."

"Thank you, but I'm absolutely rotten with tools," Haroot said. "I'll have to go down now. Sure you're all right?"

"Oh, perfectly."

Haroot regretted that he was late. Promptness was another virtue that Sally regarded highly and it was very hard for Haroot to achieve.

Dinner was quiet and uneventful and on the whole Haroot was glad that Noah was not sitting in one of the straight chairs against the dining-room wall. It would have distracted his attention from Sally, and he loved to look at her across the bowl of sweet-peas, and feel the beauty of the picture which she seemed always to create about her. How charmingly her fair head was set upon her shoulders! Only princesses in old fairy-tales carried their heads so proudly, as if encircled by a narrow, jeweled crown of gold.

He would never tire of looking at the clear line of her chin, the sweep of her hair back from her face, the soft fluffing of it above her ears. And her dark eyes were so kind and dreaming, her mouth so enchanting, so stubborn, so sweet and so alluring. Her dress was the color of the sea at evening and there was creamy old lace at the V of the open neck. She wore pearls, always, small but perfect pearls. Doubtless Benjy had given them to her as a wedding present, but that was one of the things that poor Haroot could scarcely ask.

They seldom talked during dinner, only occasional remarks when the maid went in and out—small conversational pebbles cast into the pool of silence. Such sentences as, "Timmy threw a book out the window on the kitchen roof today."—"The young imp—it must have been ruined in the rain." "It nearly was—Petra fished it in with the handle of an umbrella."—"It will take a week to get the car fixed. They have to send to Columbus for a part."—"How was Rosie feeling when she got to North Kingston?"—"She'd stopped crying and powdered her nose."—So their dinner passed, a pleasant ceremony with ordered procession of china, silver and cool green glass.

With their eyes they saw the dining-room with its Sheraton sideboard, its old portrait of Jahleel Terry looking down upon them. In their minds they saw quite different pictures. What Sally saw, Haroot could never fathom. But she seemed always the center of his thoughts.

He could never decide in what aspect he loved best to see her. Here at the table, she was full of charm and quiet dignity. With the children, she was the perfect mother, tolerant, decisive, kind. When she worked in the garden a frenzy of activity seemed to possess her. It got in her blood. Her hair was blown by the wind, and rumpled, her gloved hands were caked with earth, and often mud adorned her nose or forehead. She kneeled and dug in her borders and planted seedlings and ripped out weeds with a fervent devotion. He loved to see the curve of her back, the droop of her gold head, as she knelt, as if praying. For her the garden was a soft green background embroidered with flowers—yellow and blue and white and scarlet blossoms, small starlike flowers in the borders, tall spirelike flowers bending heavy fragrant stalks.

In her blue dress, with her fair hair, Sally was beautiful in the garden—and yet she was rather amusing. There was something about it, the smell of the earth perhaps, or the pine, or the splash and swirl of sunshine, that stripped her of some of her civilization. Here she became more primitive, spoke crossly to the children if they ran across her newly set-out seedlings, lost her perfect poise and threw sticks at the Blake's dog, who menaced the perfection of her beds.

It pleased Haroot to think that she was ever a shade less than perfect. He liked to think that she could lose herself in an emotion. She was like that when she bathed in the sea. Then it was that she took off her calm and conventional exterior as she changed her garments to a charming bathing suit. She wore no bathing cap and her hair was soon plastered darkly, smoothly, about her head. Then as she dived or swam or came out dripping from the waves, she was the essence of the winds and the sea and the sun, and joy and life coursed through her strongly. At no other time did she let herself go free, save when she loosened her chains of restraint and let her spirit run, passionately happy, passionately sorrowful, in her music in the dusk.

To Haroot, his love for her was sometimes so poignant that he felt torn and tired. It was exhausting to love so constantly and never to be granted peace. If only she would not shut him out so. If only sometimes she would laugh at his attempts at jokes, look at him without speculation in her eyes, forget to draw away from him as he came near. If only sometime she would sheath that naked sword.

BUT IT WAS hopeless, and night after night they sat silent through dinner, and tonight they had dipped their fingers in the finger-bowls, and wiped them, and folded napkins, and risen and pushed back their chairs. The ceremony was over, and they would go into the living room and Sally would play Chopin and Beethoven and Liszt, but not the *Liebestraum*—the emotionalism of that was more than Haroot could bear.

He slipped upstairs for a minute, to see what Noah was doing and found the patriarch lying on the divan in the sewing room, his stone tablets of notes resting on his knees.

"Are you all right?" Haroot asked; and Noah grunted:

"Very busy doing a description of the modern American bathroom."

"Good," Haroot said, and quietly went downstairs, where Sally was playing a nocturne. The music and the firelight and the sound of rain outside, dashing against the windows, and the wind in the pine trees, merged into sad harmony of beauty and unfulfillment—a joy with shadows of despondency and grief.

He sat and smoked and looked into the fire, and variegated shreds of thoughts sifted through his mind. What would Sally think if she should suddenly see him as he really was, if he could slip out of the hateful body of Benjy, if she should turn from her piano and look at him and see a quartz-like figure in a flame-colored tunic smoking in the chair before the hearth? Perhaps if he asserted himself, if he went to her quietly, as she was playing, bent her head back and kissed her lips—There is in women, he knew well, a pulse that beats fast at the touch of conquest—something that struggles, and surrenders, and then finds joy. But to evoke that, one must oneself have power. Between half-closed eyelids he contemplated his hand that held a half-smoked cigarette. A fat, soft hand, a hand to hide boxes of rich chocolates beneath one's collars. No one could be a conqueror who had a hand like that. Music rippled and flowed about him and made him very lonely. There was Soames in *The Forsyte Saga*. He, too, had been physically unattractive and he had tried the conqueror, the Sabine-woman business, and had failed.

"There's water running somewhere," Sally said.

"Well, naturally, it's raining floods outside."

"No; inside. There must be a leak."

Sally hurried from her piano, and Haroot followed, unbelieving. But in the pantry he saw. It was indeed leaking; water pouring from a great brown stain that was spreading over the ceiling, water dripping inside the china closets, a large pool gathering across the floor.

"You must have left the plug in, in your bath room," she accused him.

"I didn't," he said, and then realized that doubtless Noah had done that very thing. "Oh, well, perhaps I did," he amended and wondered why fate always put him in some ignominious position before her, like a bad small boy. "Perhaps I did," he said, "and if I did I'm sorry."

He dashed upstairs and into his bathroom, and there it was as he had thought—water was streaming from the flooding bowl. Noah had forgotten it. But it would not be courteous to go in and blame the old man for all the harm he had done, though Haroot was sorely tempted to open the door of the sewing room and curse the patriarch roundly. He felt irritated, as though his temper had endured about all it would endure. The sound of rushing

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water always got on his nerves, and it had been a very rainy day.

He hurried back to the pantry, where Sally was taking china out of the closet and putting it on the dining room table.

"I'm afraid that the ceiling will fall," she explained.

"Don't carry those heavy piles," he said. "Let me do it."

"No, you'll break them. Don't touch them, please."

"I shall touch them. I can carry china without breaking it. Let me tell you, Sally, that I'm not nearly as much of a fool as you like to think I am. Your mind has put a clown's suit on me and you won't see me dressed in anything else, and I can tell you I'm tired of it."

"You would like to have me see you in the hero-suit you see yourself in?"

"That's better—I like to get a little life out of you."

"Don't wipe that floor up with a dish towel, Benjy."

"Hang it, I'll wipe it with your best napkins if I want to."

"I think perhaps we'd better not continue the conversation if it is so—acrimonious."

"A good hot quarrel sometimes starts the fires."

"What fires."

"You know quite well enough."

Then an impulse overwhelmed him. He took her in his arms and kissed her, on the lips, too. But the kiss was empty. She did not even struggle. She only looked at him, scornfully.

"Do you expect me to see you in a hero-costume after that?" she said.

"Sorry," he said. "If you'll tell me his number I'll call the plumber."

"Main 398."

In the mirror in the hall he saw a fat man who looked as if he had been caught stealing apples.

The telephone was in the closet beneath the stairs.

Haroot did not speak to Noah again that night, for when he went upstairs, immediately after calling the plumber, he found the door of the sewing room closed. And in the morning, the old man was gone. He had left, however, a small stone tablet with a short note of thanks for Haroot's hospitality. And he said that he thought it best to be about his travels and investigations as early as possible and so would go off without disturbing anyone.

It was a beautiful day, and Haroot was glad that he had gone. Lates in the morning he saw Timmy and Robin and Alice-Anne playing school under the lilac bushes, and they were using Noah's tablet as a slate. They had found it in the sewing room, and Sally had rebuked them for bringing such enormous stones into the house.

CHAPTER VI

THE MONTH was past, and it was time for Haroot to return to Iblees. This time he went, feeling as one does who faces an operation without ether. He was in cold white terror, and a thousand gruesome possibilities wove about in his mind. But he put on his best suit—a gray one this time—and a dark-striped tie, and new black shoes. They were the slightest bit too tight, but he didn't notice that until he got on the train at the station, and from then on they were a maddening annoyance. It was too bad to have to be thinking of his feet when he wanted his brain perfectly clear to confront Iblees, to hold up his own end.

"Hang it all," he thought, "it's awfully hard to hold up your own end when your feet are hurting. I believe I've gained another pound or two. They'll try to be clever about it. Wish I were in my own quartz body again."

But they did not try to be clever about his weight in Iblees' office. In fact, he rather wished that they would. There was an atmosphere of serious, portentous business, a hush that was alarming, since he had an intuition that he was the reason for the hush. The blond fiend merely nodded at him when he entered, and said, "He is ready for you," and led Haroot to the door of the inner office at once.

And there was the large office with the green carpet and expensive mahogany, and there were the windows and the view of roofs and a gray and windy sky. There was the desk, with a picture of a woman on it—a different woman this month. And there was Iblees, looking at Haroot with eyes that were too powerful for Haroot's eyes to meet.

"We'll get right down to business," Iblees said. "Sit down, there's a good deal to discuss."

Haroot sat down. By crossing his right leg over his left knee, his right foot ceased to hurt him.

"Well, what observations have you made this month? Something more to report,

I hope. I hear that Noah was satisfied with your house—your guest arrangements."

"Why—did you send Noah?" Haroot was surprised.

"Well, only indirectly. He wasn't aware of it. But to get to the point—been outside your own garden this last month?"

"Yes, sire, I have, certainly." Every thought in the world seemed to fly from Haroot's head, and he was conscious only of the ache beginning again in his right foot and of the picture of the woman on Iblees' desk. He wondered if she were married and if her husband loved her. "I've been outside of my garden and I have seen as much as possible of people and I've read newspapers and magazines—"

"And what do you think of the human race from all your observations?"

"Well, I—I think it is very nice."

Iblees snorted. "Nice—nice!!! By Azrael! do you think that's the sort of thing I wanted from you?"

"No, I don't suppose it is," Haroot said. He felt very dull and unhappy. "But if I knew what you want I could try to do it for you, or tell you, or whatever it is you do want."

"I want to know what you found out about people, what they do, what they talk about—what—"

"Oh, I know what they talk about. The women talk about how many pounds they've lost or gained the last week and the men talk about things to drink, mostly."

"And you broke your neck," Iblees said, "to get in with the best people."

"They are the best people. They are delightful people."

Again Iblees snorted. "Well, now that we've found out what they talk about, what do they do?"

"They do a great many things—they sail and the men go to business and play golf and the women work in their gardens. You have no idea how hard they work. And the children take naps and play outside and consume the most extraordinary amount of cereal. You wouldn't believe it, really. Cereal twice a day, great bowls full of it. I should think they would chuck their porringers at their nurses' heads, but they are very decent little duffers, the children—"

"That's enough about cereal," Iblees said. "Now listen to me if you can for a few minutes without interrupting. You know, I presume, that we are anxious to go in for a policy of expansion, to extend our scope of influence. We always have had our own following—clients, as it were. Some have been rather lukewarm about their adherence, and then there have been many devoted followers. Perhaps you know something of the meetings of the Sabbat—witches and so forth—"

"Yes," Haroot said. "My wife had ancestors who lived in Salem, and I believe that one was a judge who persecuted those witches. She's a bit ashamed of it, but I must say I think that—I mean—well, it's a very odd business—very." He ended in confusion, realizing that he had made a bad break. Of course, those very witches were the most stanch adherents of Iblees, and here Iblees was scowling at him as if he would send him to the sixth hell itself.

"You would be very much better off yourself, my dear fellow, if you would get over your independence and join those Sabbat gatherings. It's your holding yourself aloof from us that has got you into so much trouble."

"Well, I don't know that I exactly hold myself aloof, sire," Haroot said. "I certainly work for you. But it is more than I can swallow to worship you. We might just as well be frank with each other."

"FRANKNESS is most estimable," Iblees said, "but there may come a time when I require something more in the way of allegiance. However, let that pass for the present. What I want is, as I have said, to extend my scope of influence. I want to sell myself to, well, to humanity. I'm tired of working on a small scale, and want to expand.

"I have visions, my dear fellow, visions. I want to work in big figures, not in individuals but in races, in countries. I won't rest until every man, woman and child has come under the scope of our influence. You have to begin slowly, but the time is near—the psychological moment. Conditions are changing rapidly. The current religion is crumbling. One push and it would topple over among the other ruins—"

"Other ruins?" Haroot felt vague.

"Druidism, Zoroastrianism, the Egyptian religion, the Greek and Norse gods. It's fully time for this to go and a new religion to arise. It's losing its hold upon the people. Machinery, speed, amusements, are supplanting it. You don't find your 'best' people taking it seriously these days, do you?"

"Well, I don't know." Haroot felt un-

happy. "I don't know that they would face lions for it and be pulled apart by hot pincers, in these days. It's hard to get them to take anything seriously. But I think they have a feeling for it, nevertheless."

"I don't agree with you," Iblees said. "I think that they would accept another type of religion with alacrity. Something less austere, that would provide more entertainment—living sacrifices, for instance; people really enjoy a good dramatic sacrifice."

"But a sacrifice involves cruelty, and I think that Americans as a whole dislike cruelty."

"Yes, it's a stumbling-block, but there is a way to get around it. To train the mind to it. There are ways and means, of course. And as for the object of the religion—we might take an absolutely new one, or an old one, Krishna or Vishnu perhaps."

"I don't think you could ever get Americans to swallow Krishna or Vishnu," Haroot said. "That's flat. And particularly now; a few years ago perhaps. But there was a book that came out about India that made everybody pretty much disgusted with those gods. There's no chance there."

He wished that Iblees would get down to the point of what he wanted of him. This talk of a new religion and a new god was Iblees' oldest hobby—in fact, his fixed idea. He and his sons and various other demons would sit about a fire in his cavern in the realms of Kaf, and discuss the matter pro and con by the hour, while attendant fiends winked, and yawned behind their claws. This had been going on for two thousand and odd years and doubtless, so Haroot thought, would continue for several thousands more.

"That may be so, in regard to those two," Iblees was saying. "But people will swallow a great deal more than you think. Of course in the setting up of any new religion, you have to follow more or less conventional lines. You have to have a forerunner—one who is perfectly familiar with the existing social situation, conditions as they are. He must, in a sense, pave the way. A teacher, perhaps—one who will help and instruct the new god, sponsor him, introduce him to society. And magic is essential to any new religion, at least the rudiments of magic for miracles. The new god should be instructed in some elementary magic—"

He seemed to be going on and on indefinitely. Haroot's foot was hurting again, badly, and there was a fly buzzing about Iblees' head. Haroot wondered when it would land and where, and hoped, impishly, that it would attempt Iblees' nose or the tip of his ear. He was, it must be admitted, paying scant attention to Iblees, but was thinking at the moment of Sally and Olga Vane, and congratulating himself upon having got rid of that lady rather cleverly.

"He must, as I say, be absolutely sure of his ground," Iblees said, and Haroot murmured politely:

"Yes, quite," and wondered if Olga Vane would perhaps turn her attention now to the Van Schenk man.

"There must be no mistakes," Iblees said. "No tactless remarks, no kissing the seamstress by—"

Haroot's attention snapped back to Iblees. How had he known of that humiliating affair of Miss Jennings?

"That was merely an unfortunate slip," Haroot said. "It only happened once."

"That was once too often. That's why I gave you a second chance to adjust yourself. Now, tell me this: what would you say was the one thing that stood between me and complete power over the people?"

"Why, there is only one thing really." Haroot was very tired of the conversation. "And that is the All-Hi—"

"Don't mention that name!" Iblees had turned a dark maroon color and was pounding his desk angrily. "Don't you know better than to mention that name in my presence? What I mean is, what human attribute, or whatever you call it, stands in the way of my success?"

"Well, I suppose a certain moral fiber."

"That's right, that's it exactly—a sort of unpleasant moral toughness. Well, but fortunately that can be destroyed—oh, yes, quite successfully corroded—eaten away."

"How—what do you mean?"

"Oh, there are ways and means—perhaps poisons and propaganda."

"But that's absolutely diabolical."

Iblees grinned. "What do you expect, my dear fellow? How is your wife, by the way?"

The question about Sally drove every other thought from Haroot's mind. Something inside him went numb with fear and he scarcely knew what he answered.

"Not so very well, I'm sorry to say. Hay fever. It's an exceedingly unpleasant

malady. They sniff so, and sneeze. You should be thankful, sire, that you never have that to experience. One of the advantages of your regions. Cairo, too. The basket-maker's wife never suffered from it. But poor Sally. It always begins with her on the eighth of every August." He realized that he was desperately fabricating this absurd tale about Sally for her protection. Iblees would have no desire to make the acquaintance of any lady who sniffed.

"I'm not in the least interested in hay fever," Iblees said. "And now, as to what I want you to do for me—"

Haroot's hands were cold, and he said, "Yes, sire?"

"You might get your secretary, if you have one—"

"I have; a Miss Wrinkle, but the name is absolutely inappropriate. She's very pretty, really—"

"I don't care if she's as homely as a hedge fence. Get your Miss Wrinkle to make me a list of two dozen experiments in elementary magic suitable for a youth of eighteen, with explanations.

"Yes, sire, and what else?"

"What else, nothing else—good day to you."

"But that's not all you want of me, surely?"

"That's quite enough," Iblees said.

"But do you mean, sire—"

"Go on, get out of here. I mean just what I say. And one thing more—it's good to be hospitable and kind to strangers—like Noah. Goodbye now. Send the list as soon as possible. Good afternoon."

HAROOT was out, safely, and he could scarcely believe what his ears had heard. When he found himself on the street his knees were so weak with relief and his feet hurt so, that he sat down on one of the benches outside of the Library and watched the pigeons picking up crumbs and bits of bread. Haroot slipped his heels out of his shoes and sat, relaxing.

Buses and cars and people went by him in streams and phalanges. The stone lions on their pedestals sniffed haughtily not far from where he sat. Some youths and maidens, evidently of the intelligentsia, sat on the Library steps, shins on hands, elbows on knees, in tense and awkward attitudes. The gray clouds were gathering thickly to the north. He thought that soon it would rain again.

Again and again he went over in his mind what Iblees had said and what he had answered. "The mountain labored and brought forth a mouse," Haroot thought. Was it for this simple request, merely a list of two dozen experiments in elementary magic, that he had been sent to earth with so much pomp and ceremony? Was it this that the djinn had considered worse than the hell with scorpions as large as donkeys? Was it for this that he had suffered torments of apprehension and of dread?

Well, it was often so. The experiences that you feared most keenly proved most mild and undisturbing, and again disaster leapt upon you, unsuspected, from the shadow of a roadside bush. This, then, was another little jest of Iblees. He would accept it and rejoice. He would go home and have Miss Wrinkle make out her list, and he could begin to live! Glorious to feel the weight of menace off his shoulders.

Perhaps he was free at last. Perhaps he could bend his energies to pleasant matters—to learning golf and tennis, enjoying his bridge, to playing dragons with Robin and Timmy and Alice-Anne, and taking up Benjy Bingham's law practice with some seriousness.

He would start building that grape-arbor down at the end of the garden that Sally had said she wanted. What fun it would be, working out in the sun, with the children all around him! Now, with an unhampered mind he could try to make Sally love him. The world was before him. He was free of Iblees' yoke.

He slipped his feet back into his shoes and could have gone dancing down into the street, but of course he didn't. Still, he felt that he must celebrate in some way, so he went into a candy store and ordered a chocolate ice-cream soda. And while he was sipping it through the straw with the most evident satisfaction, who should come in the shop but Mrs. Blake. Poor Haroot felt himself blushing violently. It would have been infinitely better for his reputation and self-respect had she discovered him indulging in a pint of gin. He choked on his soda, greeted Mrs. Blake with hasty confusion, left his drink half finished and fled from the place. The woman would tell Sally and Sally would look at him with raised eyebrows, and he would be bathed in humiliation again.

But, after all, why couldn't a man go off

and indulge in a quiet glass of chocolate soda, or even in a few chocolate creams without feeling as if he had broken at least five commandments? It was absurd, and so unfortunate, too, to have his good start spoiled. It would take days now to get into any sort of good graces with Sally. Sometimes, when he thought of her, he felt exactly like the ill-fated frog in the well.

Still, the meeting with Mrs. Blake did not dim his elation. He arrived at Saltmere in a driving wind, no rain, but a gale that blew out of a gray sky and bent the trees and swept the grass of meadows low before it. If Haroot could have shaken off the body of Benjy Bingham he would have flung wide his arms and launched himself upon the winds and gone shouting about the trees and roof-tops. As it was, when he arrived at home he found Timmy and Robin and Alice-Anne running about upstairs in pajamas, just after their baths and before their suppers.

"I'm a tempest," he cried to them. "Look out for me, I'm a cyclone." He draped a blanket over his head, and whistling and hooting, chased them up and down the halls and through their bedrooms. They met his onslaught with shrieks of joy and rapturous terror, scudding before him, turning to defy him with hurling pillows. Petra lumbered upstairs with the tray of their supper, and Haroot, charging with a whoop out of the nursery, collided with her. They went down in a welter of toast and cereal and apple-sauce and broken dishes and dripping puddles of milk.

She was very decent about it, covering no one knows what scorching disgust and indignation beneath mere cold disapproval and a colder calm. He tried to assuage his hot embarrassment by attempting to mop up the milk and apple-sauce and broken china with a bath towel. And Sally, returning from tea at a friend's house, came up the stairs and sighed as one would say, "What, again?" But she controlled herself admirably and went on into the nursery, where Timmy had crawled under the bed and was refusing, with shrieks, to come out.

"It's because they were over-excited, ma'm," Haroot heard Petra explaining. And again the guilty feeling came upon him. It was remarkable how often he felt like the veriest worm.

But that humiliation was temporary, and even Sally's cool and aloof bearing during the dinner did not sink him in despair as it so often had done before. If he was free from Iblees he could now turn to winning her friendship and approval, or else her love. Many people loved people they disapproved of. Most people were lovers who were in no sense friends. But he would not be satisfied, he decided, with such a relationship. He was essentially a spiritual being and would not accept life as mere animal existence. He would have to climb the wall of Sally's mental and spiritual disapproval. He would have to do more than climb it—he would have to tear it down.

THIS PARTICULAR evening she was not playing the piano. She was smocking a dress for Alice-Anne. And Haroot was ostensibly reading the latest volume of *The Forsyte Saga*. But he was more interested in his own problems, more anxious to see some way clear toward their solution, toward a happy end.

"You know," he said, "I think that I am pursued by a fate—a nemesis, like Orestes' furies, only not such violent creatures. Something is always making me break things and spill things and act like a fool when you are around. It isn't I, really—I'm not in the least that sort of person. As a matter of fact, Sally, you haven't the slightest idea what I am really like."

"Haven't I?" She didn't sound deeply interested. "What are you, then?"

"Exceedingly agreeable, and different." He chuckled, wondering what she would say if he told her just who and what he was. "Oh, awfully interesting inside. But, do you know, I don't really know what sort of person you are, either? It's ridiculous, isn't it? As if we were living with total strangers. I know what you think about meals, and clothes, and the five-cent fare in New York. But what does that amount to? What do you think about the things that matter? About good and evil, for instance, and about Ibl—Satan—and God? What do you think about God?"

She seemed astonished, and went on smocking a moment, thinking. Then she said, "Shall I recite the creed, Benjy?" It was rather cruel. It hurt.

"Why do you throw me down like that?" he said. "I am asking you a decent question. I'm trying to pull down a bit of the wall between us. If your whole theory of God and the universe can be packed into such a small trunk as the creed—well—I'm disgusted, frankly disgusted with you. Why lock yourself up so? You must have

charming thoughts, delightful ideas. Why be so stingy with them? Why be stingy with your sympathies and emotions?"

"I'm not stingy, Benjy."

"Well, I don't know what is the matter then. Perhaps your mind is so crammed full of the small things that it never has time to see the great ones. It always sees that I take one of the sacred bath towels to wipe up the floor. But it misses a blamed lot of other things."

"Does it ever occur to you that you may ever have been at fault, Benjy?"

"Perhaps I have, occasionally. But I'm talking now about since I got that hit on the head with a mast. That started a new order. The world is a great place, Sally. It's too good to waste life on unhappiness. There ought to be color and zest to it, and love and friendship and music and a dash, perhaps, of anger, and a whole lot of gayety. Even the lower regions, with all their disadvantages, are never dull—and as to the saints, well, really, they are not half as dull as they're painted, either."

"My dear Benjy, if you are going to begin on your saints again, I think I shall go up to bed. I'm simply tired out."

"That's another thing. You have no business to be tired out all the time, you women. You should arrange your time better. What's that thing by Wordsworth? —'We have given our lives away, a useless boon'—or was it a sordid boon? That's a great poem, now: 'Sit ye near some old cavern's mouth and brood until ye start as if the sea-nymphs quired.' Great, isn't it?"

"Yes, I've always loved that one. I didn't know you cared for it."

"That's what I've been saying." He was quite triumphant. "You don't know the least thing about me."

"Hidden gold in you, Benjy?" She was putting thimble and scissors and blue sky embroidery stuff back in her sewing-basket. "Well, good night," she said.

"Good night," he said, and felt that he had at least chipped a bit of mortar from around one of the bricks of the wall that separated them.

"Good night," she said. "Will you lock up?"

"Yes, surely."

"And please see that Grandma is out in the back part of the house."

"I will." He chuckled, amused as always at the kitten's name. "It isn't late," he thought. "I'll call up Miss Wrinkle at her house and tell her to get to work on that list of experiments first thing in the morning." What a ridiculous request it was.

HE was just dropping off to sleep when it came to him. How he could have been so blind, he could not imagine. But his talk with Iblees, what he had said, the questions he had asked, then the request that had seemed so simple—but it was not simple; it was ghastly. There was a vague hideous meaning in it, a meaning like a red blot, when you shut your eyes—a blot that grows larger and larger and nearer and nearer until it suffuses your vision with vast crimson terror. So was this fear now approaching Haroot. In a moment, when he grasped the whole significance, when he was enveloped in it, it would be too vile a thing to be endured.

Sentence by sentence his talk with Iblees reshaped itself in his mind. How had he ever been such a fool as to ignore it? What if for two thousand and more years the same things had been said before? They had been said and discussed and reiterated, and plans had been made and laid and remade for a moment that would sometime come. A moment when Iblees should strike for the control of the world and the people. When he could put his shoulder against the high bright tower of civilization and shove it, roaring, crumbling into dust.

The time had come. The hour was at hand. A thousand signs declared it to any who would for a minute stand still and listen. And from the bits and fragments of Iblees' conversation you could piece and fit a picture of cataclysm and ruin of mankind. What had he said of the sapping of moral fiber of humanity, of minds trained to cruelty, of living sacrifices? There was the meaning burned clear in Haroot's mind. And worse. Who was the forerunner of this new religion that was to be established? Who was to be the one who was familiar with existing social conditions, who must be absolutely sure of his ground? A teacher, perhaps—one who would help and instruct the new god, take him into his home, where the guest arrangements were so satisfactory—one who was able to teach him at least the rudiments of magic, since magic is essential to the establishment of a new religion.

"Good Glory," Haroot thought, "I am the forerunner. This is worse than the seventh hell."

The thought of it filled him with a cold, sick panic. The devil had chosen him to stir up this vile brew of evil. His hands were clammy and he found that he was shivering. He must not let himself get worked up and excited. He must lie still, be calm and think clearly. He must relax, stop shivering, and think. But his mind seemed in flame, and foolish alliteratve phrases spun about and about, as if on a burning wheel within him.

"The devil's spoon, the devil's spawn, the devil's pawn," again and again and again, "the devil's spoon, the devil's spawn, the devil's pawn," till he thought, "I shall go mad unless I get away from it." Then for a moment he was free from the wheel.

It was a dark night with no moonlight coming in the windows. But the wind was restless and there was a far sound of the sea. A dog howled and howled across distant hills and crickets chirred and a shutter banged somewhere.

He saw horrible visions. Churches with fallen roofs and doors hanging by a hinge and banging in the wind forlornly, and broken altars red with unholy sacrifices to Iblees' new and evil god. He saw small pleasant houses with their fronts ripped off, their walls gutted—destruction, desolation, and half-mad, starving people lurking in the ruins, slinking like shadows about the rock-choked streets.

He heard a noise downstairs as of soft, padding footsteps, and remembered that he had forgotten to put Grandma in the back part of the house. She would probably sleep on the cushions in the living-room and Sally would be annoyed again.

But Iblees—what was he to do? He must defy him, of course. There was always one's will-power. Quite foolish and unnecessary to settle back into being the devil's spoon, like a lump of metal. But to defy him was not enough. He must prevent him. But how? Only The Highest could keep Iblees from setting up his new and vile god—only The Highest, or perhaps the moral fiber of humanity. If it were possible to arouse the people to their danger.

If he could go forth crying in a loud voice of the peril that confronted them. If he could rush through the subways with his wings and flame-colored tunic shouting out that Iblees was about to hurl their world to ruin— Would they hear? Would they stop their gum chewing and listen? Yes, perhaps. Perhaps he could arouse them. Perhaps they would take measures. If they did there would be no danger. After all, they could easily save themselves—if they believed. But he must warn them, make them see the peril that impended. He would first tell Sally and convince her, and together they would defy Iblees and save the people of the land.

He put on his dressing-gown, realizing that he was still trembling. The halls were dark, and he ran into the corner of his door and bumped his forehead and went on, miserably, down to Sally's room.

Then at the door he hesitated. It was closed. Ridiculous to have to knock at it, to have Petra, perhaps, or one of the children hear him. He turned the knob quietly. The door was locked. Then he was afraid to knock at it, afraid of what she might think. But he could not stand there in the hall, trembling, nor could he face the thought of going back alone to his room, to face the choking dark knowledge of the horror of Iblees' plans. There was no time to be lost to stop him. He must knock at Sally's door.

She answered, sleepily, and his heart jumped.

"It's I, Har—Benjy," he said. He tried to make his voice as low as possible. "There's something the matter."

IT would have been more gracious had she opened the door wider, but she looked out of the crack, alarmed.

"Not the children," he said, "at least, they are all right now."

"What is it? Are you ill?" she asked. Her fair hair was rumpled and on end, like a small boy's, and she wore, beneath a gay striped flannel wrapper, blue silk pajamas.

"I'm not exactly ill," he said, "but I have something to tell you."

"Can't it wait until morning?" He could see that she was reluctant to let him in her room.

"It can't wait a minute," he said. "I've got to tell you right away, and you've got to understand it. It's most fearfully important. It's—it's nationally important—and more than that—it involves the whole of mankind and civilization." He shivered again, and felt his teeth chattering.

"Come in," she said, and lighted the lamp on the table beside her bed. Wind blew in her window, roughly, and rustled the pages of a magazine on her table. She closed the window.

Everything was as it had been—as he had dreamed it a thousand times. . . .

"I'm awfully cold," he said, and sat down on the edge of her bed. "But that's not it. You see it's just occurred to me that we're in the most awful danger—humanity and civilization, I mean. You know yesterday when I went up to the city I saw Iblees, that's Satan—the devil—you know, and I discovered that he is hatching the most diabolical scheme—well, really it makes me ill to think of it; it would anybody.

"He's got to be stopped or the whole world will be destroyed, simply rotted. And there are only two ways to stop him. One is by going to the All-Highest and telling him the whole business, and that's terribly hard, naturally. And the other way is just by rousing mankind to the realization of its danger. And if you and I work together we can do it, surely —only we'll have to work together, and you'll have to be willing to understand it. Now, this afternoon when I went to the city— Gosh, I'm cold."

"Here, put this extra blanket about you." She pulled a blanket around his shoulders, and threw one about her own. Then she sat on her chaise-longue, with her elbow on her knee and her chin on her hand, and looked at him. "Go on," she said. "Better begin at the very beginning."

"All right," he said, "perhaps I'd better. Oh, I forgot to put the cat out in back."

"Never mind the cat. Go on with your story."

"All right," he said, "I suppose I'll have to begin at the beginning. In the first place, I'm not Benjy Bingham at all and I never was Benjy Bingham." He caught a glimpse of himself in Sally's mirror—a fat pale man with mouse-colored rumpled hair, a fat man wrapped in a blanket, a fat man whose eyes looked haunted, and he realized how fantastic and mad his statement sounded, but there was nothing for it but to go on. "My name," he was firm about it, "is Haroot. First, I was a Heavenly being. I used to light the lamps in Paradise, and let me tell you that was a very responsible position there. And I was a very different-looking person then, too. Not fat in the least, and I had very decent wings, indeed. That's where I knew all the saints and went to Saint Cecelia's Sunday-afternoon teas. They were delightful. Her husband is charming.

"Well, I suppose I was too cocky—too egotistical, or conceited—they thought so, some of them, so I was sent to earth to learn compassion and humility, and they chose the body of a fig-seller of Cairo, not at all a suitable person. It was a great mistake on their part. However, it was an interesting experience in some ways. I made my mistakes, although I don't think they were really my fault. The fig-seller was a person of so little restraint—and the basket-maker's wife was a—well, that friendship had been going on long before I took over his body and things went rather badly, and I kissed her—I'll tell you about that sometime. But although there was a great row about it, I did it really because it seemed the only thing to do at the time. Other people were involved and it was all extremely complicated, but of course I was the one to be punished—I always seem to be most awfully unlucky.

"So I had to be punished and I was sent down to the lower regions to hang by the heels in a pit for eternity. But Iblees—that's Satan, you know—wanted me for something. I had been teaching the young sheytans and djinns and things magic, how to get in and out of bottles and to make simple transformations. I'm very good at magic.

"Well, Iblees sent for me and told me that he wanted me to go to earth to do a mission for him, and he said that I should slip into some one's body at a revival meeting. But I said I didn't like that idea because if I went to earth again I wanted to be in the body of one of the best people—you see, the fig-seller of Cairo had been really too plebeian—so Iblees let me have my own way, only he hurried me too much. So I came up to earth and looked about a bit, and then I saw you in a drug-store and decided that —well, to tell the truth, I fell violently in love with you, Sally; love at first sight, it was, if there ever was a case. Well, so then I knew that your husband had been summoned by Azrael—he's the angel of death you know—so I had my plans made, and when the boat went over and he was hit on the head by the mast and drowned, I dived in and entered his body at the moment he went out and met Azrael.

"It's exceedingly easy, you know. There have been thousands of cases of a spirit's possessing another body; the Bible is full of such affairs, only very often the spirit who comes and takes control is a worthless sort of creature, mischievous and

malicious. You can't do it very well unless you're rather clever. And of course I am not one of those evil, malicious ones. Well, as I was saying, I got into Benjamin Bingham's body quite safely and then when I came to I was on the dock with somebody pumping my back—and there I was—you see?"

"Yes, I see," she said. She was regarding him oddly, with a little frown. "That was a most interesting dream, Benjy."

"Dream!" He was astonished.

"Certainly, my dear. A dream, while you were unconscious."

"Why, ridiculous!" he said. "It's the literal truth I'm telling you. Why, I could tell you things that I couldn't possibly have dreamed—the kind of sandwiches and cakes we had at Cecelia's afternoon teas, and the way Saint Jerome's lion used to snore—he had sort of asthma—and all about the fig-seller of Cairo, and the basket-maker's wife and the way she sat out in the sun in the afternoons and went fishing in the Nile sometimes for little minnows—and a thousand things about Iblees and his five sons. One of them has charge of traffic. I rather think that he's to be the new god that we're to sponsor. My dear, you'll simply have to believe me."

He found himself shivering again, and pulled the blanket even tighter about him.

"That's all right, Benjy." She used the soothing tones now that she had for the children when they had hurt themselves. "I know how vivid those dreams are, and awfully interesting, too. I want you to tell me all about it sometime, but I think you'd better go to sleep now. It's rather late."

SHE was leaning back in her chaise-longue, still regarding him with that strange, studying manner. Her blanket had slipped off her shoulders and her neck was white and lovely, and with her hair rumpled she seemed more accessible, more human, less austere. Surely he would make her understand, force her to believe him. The necessity of it made his head burn and ache, and the rest of him was cold as ice.

"See here, you've just go to believe me," he insisted. "You must realize how serious it is. Do you think I'd get up at this hour if it were any little two-penny trouble? I've got troubles enough of my own and I've never bothered you much with them, not that you'd have cared a hang if I had—"

"Oh, Benjy!" That seemed to touch her.

"No, you wouldn't. You're very delightful and charming and all that, but you're as cold as an ice-cube, my dear. But, now, don't let's get off on that tack. The thing I've got to think about, now, is this hideous plan that Iblees is hatching. You see, since I was sent to hang by the heels in hell, I've been more or less under his jurisdiction. Not that I've ever worshiped him. I drew the line at that, even though the All-Highest simply abandoned me.

"Still, if you once have heard that chorus of the Heavenly creatures crashing out, with all the trumpets and the gold and white and silver and emeralds—well, you can't quite bring yourself down as low as Iblees' worship demands. And that's the trouble. He has this simply rotten, diabolical scheme. If he puts it through—and it's absolutely easy and logical—if he puts it through, the moral fiber of the human race—well, at any rate, of this country—will be slowly eaten away—gutted. Don't look like that, my dear; it's true. You simply must believe me. If you believe me, then we can work together and convince the rest of the people of their danger. It's appalling, and there's no time to be lost. We'll have to send out alarms through all the newspapers and magazines of the country. Fool that I was, I never thought, when he told me to make out that list, what he meant by it. That it is the first step. It's unbelievable—incredible!"

"What list, Benjy?" she said.

"A list of two dozen experiments in elementary magic. You see, I told him—"

"Benjy darling," Sally had risen and dropped her blanket behind her, "I want you to be quiet now and try to go to sleep. We can discuss this in the morning. I'm going to give you some aromatic spirits of ammonia."

"I don't need aromatic spirits of ammonia any more than I need ipecac for croup. Don't you believe me, Sally—you *must* believe me—"

He heard her snap on the light and move about in the bathroom. Now she was getting down a bottle, and she had turned the water on and was running it into a glass. It was too terrible if he couldn't convince her. If he took and shook her by the shoulders perhaps he could shake some sense into her. Couldn't she see by looking at his face how serious

it all was, how he was crucifying himself with the truth?

"I don't want the beastly stuff," he cried. "I won't take it, I tell you, Sally. Look here, don't you believe one word of what I've been telling you? Do you mean to say I made it all up, every bit of it? Take that cursed glass away." He shoved it away from his nose, but she put her hand on his shoulder.

"Drink it down, Benjy dear; you'll be able to sleep, then." There was something about her voice that made him obey it.

"Oh, very well." He gulped down the drink. It was warmish and pleasant, and seemed to loosen tight and tortured strings inside him. "If you won't believe me," he said, "there's nothing for it but to take all this up to the All-Highest. It will be an awful trip, and I haven't the least idea how I can get up there, anyway, with this beastly body of Benjy Bingham's, and I don't want to die before—well, I don't want to die before we've been friends, at least. I have so much that I want to do here. I don't see how I can die and leave it all, quite yet."

"There's no chance of your dying, Benjy. Get into bed, you're shivering dreadfully. Here, get in."

He slipped in between cool linen sheets and buried his face in the pillow. He could not seem to control his trembling, at all, nor could he stop a dry sob or two. Every nerve in his body was as tight as if in another moment it would snap with a "ping," like the string of a violin. Then he felt the small warm body of a hot-water bag slipped in to his feet.

"I'm going to sit here on the bed beside you," Sally said, "and rub your head. Now let yourself go, lie loosely, just relax."

"I suppose you would think it crazy if I asked you to sing to me?" he said, meekly.

"Not at all, I'll sing one of the children's songs—

'Over in the meadow,
In the sand in the sun—'"

Her hand passed over his head slowly, soothingly, and her voice sang the absurd song as softly as wind blows through slim reeds standing in blue water. The strings of his nerves relaxed and loosened. So she would have soothed Robin or Alice-Anne and Timmy, singing to them. At last he slept.

WHEN he woke in the morning, rain slanted and beat against the windows, and the smell of soaked grass and dripping pine came to him, and he saw that it was raining in where the windows were open, and Sally's curtains were getting wet.

He felt that it was his fault, in some way, and knew that he should get up and do something about it. Close the windows, of course. But he was so tired, and feelings of frustration and impotence were like rusty chains that bound and rubbed his spirit, chafing it raw. So he lay and looked at the curtain flapping with a sodden flop, and listened to the rain and wondered where the children were and why there was no sound of their strife with Petra over shirts and socks and stockings.

Perhaps it was very late. It felt late, but he was not hungry. He knew that in a few minutes he would have to begin thinking about Iblees again. He would have to enter that dark wood of dread alone, fight his way through, combating shrieking fears and torments. Last night he had failed to stir Sally from her firm pedestal of security and common sense and complacency. "The morning's at seven, the hill-side's dew-pearled," he thought. People cling to that as a sort of life-preserver. A nice round, fat, cruller-like life-preserver—dusted over with powdered sugar. "God's in His Heaven—All's right with the world!" So they float around on that pleasant theory and shut their eyes to the poor creatures sinking all about them. And if you see humanity sailing full tilt on to a rock and shout out and try to get one of those happy floaters to shout too, and help you avert the disaster, they shut their eyes all the tighter and say, "'the lark's on the wind, the snail's on the thorn'—now, dear, take some aromatic spirits of ammonia."

What was the use? He would make one more attempt to explain matters to Sally, make her see the danger to the country. Surely she wasn't deaf, and she could understand the English language. It should not be as if he were shouting against a high brick wall. He would try again, but first he must get up and shave. No one could be convincing with such a stubbly chin.

"I feel like a worn-out elastic band," he thought, as he sat on the edge of his bed. "It's all nonsense, of course; I have plenty of strength to go in and shave."

He saw himself, a fat and pale, and disheveled creature in rumpled lavender pajamas, incongruously framed in the beautiful maple frame of Sally's great-great-grandmother's mirror. For a moment he leaned his arms on her chest of drawers and studied himself, finding a certain bitter satisfaction almost sadistic, in such self-abnegation. His chin was stubbly, his eyes washed out and tragic-looking, his mouth sagging, and his nose shone—a truly repulsive ensemble. No wonder Sally despised him. Any one would. Her powder-box was open beside her jewel-box. He idly dusted his nose with the powder. Then through the glass he saw the door open. There was Sally, and a man with her. Dr. Adams—he who had officiated at the resuscitation of Benjy Bingham from drowning. A stocky little man he was, with a manner like a robin.

In panic, Haroot turned toward them, the powder snowy upon his nose. It was inexcusable for Sally to have brought the man upstairs and burst in this way without knocking, without any announcement or warning at all. It was enough to make any one fairly raging. And the sweet way that she spoke to him— "Good morning, Benjy dear; Dr. Adams dropped in, and I thought he might like to see how you're getting on." Never a word about the powder on the nose. They had assumed that maddening manner of considering everything perfectly natural, while beneath the manner they were vigilance itself to discover any hint of the abnormal. Haroot knew. "Of course they think I'm completely off my bean," he thought. "The powder was the finishing touch." But he would not explain or apologize for it, nor would he wipe it off. Let it stay, let them think what they wanted to.

"Good morning," he said. "Lot of rain we're having, aren't we?"

"Yes, bad weather. But you're looking very fit, Mr. Bingham."

"Never better," he said. Impishly, he was determined to make it as hard as he could for them to get to the point. But Sally was not one to waste time in beating about bushes.

"Dr. Adams came to see if he could do anything to help those bad dreams that have been troubling you."

"Very kind," Haroot said, "but they don't happen to be dreams."

"Suppose you get back to bed, Mr. Bingham, and tell me a little about them," the doctor suggested. And really it seemed the wisest, the most dignified thing to do. Moreover, there came another knock at the door, and the maid appeared with his breakfast-tray, and for a moment or two there was a feeling of confusion and indecision—what was to be done with the tray and who was to sit where. So Haroot got back into Sally's bed, and a bed-table and the tray were put in front of him, and the business of eating his breakfast and attempting to convince Dr. Adams and Sally of his sanity, started simultaneously.

It was all very awkward and trying. He had made a wrong start, what with the powder on the nose and the difficulty of eating grape-fruit without squirting it all over the place. He had to deal with tragedy, with elements of horror, sinister, ominous, dread. And the recital of his tragedy had started with grotesque comedy. The mood was tuned to the wrong key.

"They are not dreams at all," he repeated. "But I quite see how absurd they sound to Sally. Still you, as a medical man, must have heard of cases of spirit-

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possession. Why, the Bible is full of them."

"Do you mean those cases of casting out devils?" The doctor was regarding him with scientific interest.

"Exactly," Haroot said. "But I am not a devil. I really can't have you thinking that, Dr. Adams. Though I must admit that most of the famous cases of spirit-possession have been ones where the spirit was an evil one. And that's natural, because the bad ones make more disturbance and create a lot of notoriety. There was an Early Egyptian lady, Bent-en-resht, who was possessed of a demon. And there were two boys in Illfurt. Perhaps you've heard about them. They were possessed by simply vile demons, beastly but well-educated. They gave the boys fits—too unpleasant to go into details. Sally wouldn't enjoy them, but they made these two small boys speak all sorts of languages with perfect fluency—French, Italian, English and different dialects of Spanish and Italian. And the boys, just peasant people they were, couldn't possibly have learned them themselves. And then there was the case of Helene Josphine Poierier of Coullon."

"Yes, I've heard of her," Dr. Adams said.

"WELL, you see, then," Haroot said, "why is it so impossible to believe that such a thing happened to the body of Benjamin Bingham? It's authenticated by the Bible and by science. Why think I'm crazy because I say that such a thing has happened again? Why regard it as anything horrible? I don't really think that Benjamin Bingham amounted to very much or that Sally—forgive me, my dear, I'm going to be quite frank—I don't really think that Sally cared a rap of her finger about him. And let me tell you, Haroot is a much pleasanter person than Benjy Bingham ever thought of being—why not accept what I say as being true and try to help me? I need help awfully."

He gulped down a piece of toast the wrong way, and choked and was thoroughly uncomfortable. Moreover, he was so exhausted by his worry and his bad night and his efforts to make Sally and the doctor believe him, that his eyes filled with tears and he couldn't find a handkerchief and was forced to sniff.

"Of course we are going to help you," the doctor said soothingly. "That's exactly what we're for."

"Yes, but you'll help me with your blasted diets and tonics and vitamins. It isn't that, that I need. I don't want your cursed vitamins, I want understanding."

"Exactly—you're quite right, but we do understand you."

"Yes; you've locked and bolted your minds against what I'm trying to tell you, and you're sitting inside warming your toes at the fire of your own complacency, and the human race is going to rot and ruin outside your door—the human race, and your own children will go down with it, I tell you. You could stop it if you would try—if you'd listen to what I'm telling you. Good God! stop looking at each other like that. I'm not crazy. It's the truth I'm telling you. There's the vilest evil brewing that ever's been perpetrated. There's a new god being set up, worse than Baal, worse than Moloch. I can stop it if you'll help me. One person can do anything in the world if a few others will only believe in him and help a little. Think of Confucius and Mohammed and Joan of Arc and Peter the Hermit. And if you don't help me combat this plan of Satan's, I'll simply have to go up and report to The Highest—and how I can manage that, I don't see—"

"The Highest?" the doctor asked Sally quietly.

"He means God."

"I think that Dr. Peterson's would be the best place." Ridiculous how they were talking as if Haroot were a child, or a deaf person. He was fairly infuriated by their stubborn denseness. He had given up the attempt to eat his breakfast and was gripping the edges of the bed-table to keep his hands from trembling. But he realized that he must not lose his self-control.

He must calm himself. As if he were driving a chariot and the horses were running away galloping wildly; he must drag back on the reins, pull them in, hold them tight and draw them tighter. If he were really crazy, as they were convinced, he would hurl the breakfast-tray at the exasperating doctor. Benjy Bingham would do it, but Haroot could maintain his courtesy even in the face of Iblees himself.

"Oh, well," he said wearily, "it's quite all right. Don't give another thought to it. After all, it's my own problem. I'll be able to work it out in some way."

"Oh, yes, surely, those little worries easily disappear when we have had a good rest and change. A change helps wonderfully sometimes, Mr. Bingham."

The doctor's soothing tones were more maddening than if he had squeaked a

finger-nail on a blackboard. And even Sally seemed to realize that he had failed to strike quite the right note.

"Would you be willing," she said, "to go off for a while to Dr. Peterson's rest-hotel, up in Allyntown? No, it's not what you think it is, Benjy. I promise you that. But Dr. Adams thinks that you need a real rest, and a change."

Haroot looked at her. She seemed pale and worried. Perhaps, after all, there was somewhere deep within her the smallest living coal of fondness for him. There was something in her eyes that hinted that. And she was honesty itself. If she said that Dr. Peterson's was not the sort of place he was afraid it was, then it wasn't. Haroot need have no more anxiety, there.

"It's a very pleasant hotel sort of place for people who are a bit run down and need rest and comfort and quietness and good air and sunshine. It's right on the side of a mountain and is lovely, Benjy. You'd like it, I know."

She was almost pleading with him, begging him not to make it hard for them. And he could make it deucedly hard, he knew. Still, that would be a childish thing to do. They had him chained by innumerable intangible shackles. He could fight and struggle and object and give them a bad time of it. But they would defeat him in the end. Better to accept with dignity, to surrender, as if it were no surrender at all. After all, he could think out his next step quite as well from Dr. Peterson's rest-hotel as he could from his own room in Salt-mere.

"Why, I think it would be an excellent idea," he said. "I'd like a change." But that was a black lie, for the thought of leaving Sally and the children and the sunny peace of this house and garden made him want to weep aloud. "A little variety is the spice of life—and so on. I say, Sally, do you think I could have a little more coffee? I hate to be a bother, but perhaps Rosie could bring me up some. This is as cold as ice."

"Why, surely," she said, but Dr. Adams interrupted her.

"Better not, perhaps. The caffein is too stimulating. One of those coffees where the caffein is first removed."

She looked at Haroot almost pitifully. "I'm awfully sorry," she said. "I haven't a bit in the house, but I'll take the car and get some right away, Benjy."

"In all this rain? Indeed, you won't," he said. "It doesn't matter in the least."

But it did matter. After they had gone out, to hold a whispered consultation about him in the sewing-room, Haroot drank his coffee to its chill and bitter dregs. Then the maid came in and took the tray.

CHAPTER VII

THEY traveled to Dr. Peterson's by car, with Sally driving. Haroot tried but found that he was more tired than he had thought. It made him nervous to have to pass other cars in the long swift streams of traffic.

"I offer up a prayer at each one I pass," he said to Sally, "like beads on a rosary, ebony beads carved like little cars strung around the neck of the earth. 'Each car a bead, each bead a prayer.'" It was shortly after that remark that Sally took the wheel, and kept it. And Haroot was rather glad. It was enough to sit beside her and watch the green of fields and hills roll past and disappear behind them. It was enough to try not to think of the problem that he had to face.

They had lunch on a high field in a meadow. There were daisies and tall red and tan grasses about them, and a gray stone wall and two cedar trees with frosty blue berries behind their backs. Below them the field dipped to a country lane and the roof of an old white farmhouse, and beyond rose hills checkered with green and tan and reddish fields. There were great soft clouds, but not too many, and the winds were sweet with sun-warmed hay. And Sally was kind, so kind that Haroot could scarcely bear it.

He lay stretched on the warm grass and ate chicken sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs and drank iced tea, from a thermos bottle; and he looked at Sally, charming in her gray suit and soft blue hat and scarf, neatly eating a banana, and he felt that happiness was at last dangled within his reach—like a golden apple. But the time for happiness for him had passed. Indeed, it had never been. He sighed, and Sally looked at him.

"Do you want a banana?" she asked, and he shook his head and smiled.

"No, thank you. I want the golden apples of the Hesperides. Now don't look frightened, Sally. Whenever I say anything like that your spine stiffens. I can see it even through your gray suit. Doesn't it ever occur to you that once in a while I talk symbolically?"

She picked up a sharp stone and began to dig a nice little grave for the banana-skin.

"Do you?" she said. "It's such a recent development of yours, Benjy, that it puzzles me, I suppose."

"But why should it puzzle you? Why don't you—well, why don't you try to understand me a bit, instead of slamming the doors of your mind to it?"

"But I do understand you," she said, "perhaps, Benjy."

He snorted. "Yes; and when I tell you the simple truth about my being a heavenly spirit in the body of your husband, you think I'm crazy, and send for the doctor. Now your spine's stiffening again, Sally."

"No, it's not." But she was lying. And for quite some moments she did not answer but applied herself to digging the banana's grave. Then she came upon a worm and picked it out of the earth gingerly between thumb and forefinger, and flung the wriggling thing away. "When you talk that way, are you speaking symbolically, Benjy?" she asked.

"No, I'm not," he answered. "All that is the literal truth. Good heavens, my dear, haven't you ever heard of such a thing as spiritual possession? Haven't you ever read the Bible even?"

"Of course; I was brought up on it." She was indignant.

"But evidently you didn't really believe a word of it. That's the way with most people."

"Why, what a shocking thing to say."

"Truth usually is shocking. I mean real truth. What did you think was meant by all that casting out of devils?"

"Do you mean that that is the sort of creature you think you are?"

"Not at all. I never meant to imply anything of the sort. In fact, I distinctly told you the other day that I was not that kind of creature. I am—"

"Of course, I remember in some of the old paintings," she interrupted him. "There's a Botticelli in the National Gallery, where some saint is expelling a horrible little thing out of a man's mouth—a demon sort of thing, black with jagged wings. But, of course, that was all mediaeval nonsense."

"Mediaeval nonsense, nothing," he said. "Those mediaeval ones came nearer the truth than any one. They had the truth in them. Those Early Italians and Flemish got the real sense of the celestial regions. Why, I've been to many a celestial tea-party that was exactly like a picture by Fra Angelico or Botticelli—bright gold halos and wings and trumpets and little harps and things, and robes all those clear blues and reds and greens, with gold borders and tracery. And the little bright flowers in the grass and celestial towers in the background. Lovely! They were inspired, those people."

"At least it's a diverting fancy, Benjy."

He sighed. There was no use to talk to her about it. She was straightening the limp yellow corpse of the banana in its grave, and then she sifted earth over it and patted it down, rounding it a little.

"Let's give it a headstone," Haroot said, and reached a hand back to the stone wall. He found a small thin stone, pointed and gray-painted with lichen, and he stuck it in the ground and picked two buttercups and three blue grass-flowers and made them into a sheaf, tied about with a ribbon of grass.

"Benjy, you are sometimes a pleasant fool," she said, and the catch in her voice kindled joy in him.

"Is there a chance for us, Sally?" he said. "Don't you think we might be able to pull it off a bit better?"

He took her hand and held it, and she didn't draw it from him.

"We're two islands, my dear, with a swift stream of misunderstanding between us—my, well, mysticism, if you like to call it that, and your conventionality; but if we could bridge it with acceptance, and humor, and tolerance, and understanding? If you would only let yourself believe in my saints—"

"You spoil it all," she cried, and jumped to her feet. "You always have spoiled it. Just when I have my vision of beauty—just when I'm in the middle of a *Moonlight Sonata* then you come in and drop an armful of whisky bottles!"

"They weren't all whisky," he said.

"And just when I think that perhaps there may be something for us together, then you bring up your fantastic absurdities. It's better not to hope—not to let yourself feel anything and have emotions—"

"Oh, so that's what you've been doing, deliberately encasing yourself in a sort of shell of coldness—shutting yourself up alive in a tomb of indifference. It's a coward's trick to be afraid of life."

"I'm not a coward." He had stung her. "I've suffered too much."

"Poppycock, the human soul has infinite capacity for suffering. It thrives on it."

"I won't talk any longer. I hate to talk to you."

"Of course you do. I make you think. All you modern women hate to think. It makes you uncomfortable."

"Benjy, if we go on like this we shall be quarreling."

"Fine!" he said. "Nothing better. It's what you need, a good brisk, primitive quarrel. I'm going to strip that shell of coldness off you."

She flushed very red. She was beautiful, and angry.

"It's time we were going," she said. "Will you please hand me those egg sandwiches? Blow that ant off them, please."

To the unfortunate ant climbing a mountain of sandwich, Haroot's puff was a cyclone that carried it to a distant spear of timothy grass. But Haroot strode away to a pine tree at the top of the hill, and there he stood looking off at sunny fields and grazing cows and the quiet roofs and steeple of a village.

A chime of bells came to him faintly, and the sweet smells of warm meadows, and for a moment peace laid her cool hand upon him. Then Sally called to him, and he looked down and saw her car parked in the lane and remembered where they were going, and the thought of Ibiees plunged him again into despair.

Clouds were gathering to the north for a storm.

THEY arrived at Dr. Peterson's in Allyntown, late in the evening, in the midst of a gale and a slainting rain. As they drove up, Haroot received the impression of an American building trying to be Italian and not succeeding any too admirably. Perhaps once it had been a long low farmhouse with barns attached and wings added, ramblingly. But it had taken unto itself iron balconies and an overgarment of stucco. And the soft blur of appletrees at its south corner contrasted strangely with the tall dark spires of poplars, rain-drenched and blowing along the lighted entrance to the house.

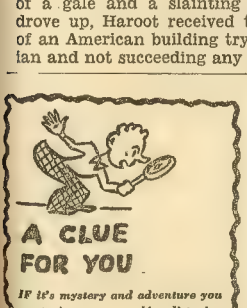
Inside it was not unpleasant. They went, blinking, into a wide hall, and felt the comfort of an open fire and bright chintz and wicker furniture. A basket of apples was on a table. A gray cat slept beside two knitting women. Several people were reading the best magazines or newest novels, and in a corner two couples were playing bridge. An agreeable young woman who looked like a young man by Van Dyke, came to greet them and led them to a desk to register. Then they were escorted to their rooms, where more apples awaited them.

"That's the only wrong touch," Haroot said. "It's the only thing here that over-emphasizes health. I say, do you tip the boys in a place like this, Sally?"

The boy was putting down bags and opening a window in Haroot's room.

"Oh, I don't think so," she answered. "I imagine you do all that at the end of the week."

"Better to be on the safe side," Haroot whispered, and money clinked in the youth's hand as he went out. "I always give them too much," he said. "How I'd hate to carry a lot of back-breaking bags and be wondering all the time how much tip I'd get for them and thinking about how I'd take my girl to the movies perhaps with what I got and planning what necktie I'd wear, and then get ten cents for it. I say, these apples aren't half bad, are they?" He was sitting on the edge of the bed, eating a large red one. "But I've always won-



QUICK AS A FLASH
Sundays, 5:30 p.m., EST.
Detective drama for quiz fans

NICK CARTER
Sundays, 6:30 p.m., EST.
Lon Clark as radio's Nick Carter

SHERLOCK HOLMES
Sundays, 7:00 p.m., EST.
Conan Doyle's stories dramatized

THE FALCON
Mondays, 8:00 p.m., EST.
Romance mixed with murder

QUIET PLEASE
Mondays, 9:30 p.m., EST.
By W. Cooper, writer of "Lights Out"

MYSTERIOUS TRAVELLER
Tuesdays, 8:00 p.m., EST.
Eerie and supernatural tales

RACKET SMASHERS
Wednesdays, 9:30 p.m., EST.
Experts counteract crime

Check local newspaper program listings against possible variations in broadcast schedules.

MUTUAL BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.

dered why Eve jeopardized all the future of her family just for an apple. If it had been a peach now, or a honeydew melon—"

"Benjy, please don't sit on your bed with your wet overcoat on," Sally implored him. "And please, my dear, while you are here do try to drop all your Biblical fancies. Please just rest and think of nice normal things."

"What are nice normal things, Sally?"

"Oh, things like golf and—well—politics."

"Who-is-g o i n g - t o-be-the-next-mayor sort of stuff?"

"Well, yes, you know what I mean."

"Yes, I know what you mean. You want me to smother my mind with a nice soft pillow—kill it dead. Do you know what I came here for? Since you wouldn't help me—since you are doing the best you can to smother your mind—I came here to find God."

"Benjy!" she said. "You mustn't talk like that, you mustn't."

He put his hands on her shoulders, gently, and looked into her eyes. They were dark and frightened.

"You live in a very small world, my dear," he said. "It has four kingdoms—one is your house, one is golf, one is bridge, and one the newest novels."

"It isn't true!" she cried, and pulled away from him. "What right have you to say that?"

"What right have you to say that it's abnormal to try to find God? It's the most normal thing in the world."

THE next morning Sally went, looking worn and tired. They discussed at breakfast such matters as the sending on of mail and the payment of bills; and their attitude to each other was that of business partners devoid of all vexatious personal attributes. In the doorway Sally kissed him with the fervor of a maiden great-aunt, and he wrapped her scarf about her neck and received an absent-minded thanks as reward. Then he watched her go out in the drizzling rain.

It was not a bad place at all, Dr. Peterson's. You rode electric horses or pulled violent races in imaginary shells in the gymnasium. Then you luxuriated like Romans in deep salt-water baths, and afterward were rubbed with oils and unguents until sleep stole upon you, and you drowsed until the next white-sheeted man appeared in the doorway of your booth to take your place.

There were hours consecrated to resting in the sun, on the balcony outside of Haroot's window. That was very pleasant. The food, however, was poor, after the first week, and the coffee as unpalatable as any coffee one finds in France. But the most trying aspect of it was the mental slant of Dr. Peterson, and that Haroot discovered the first rainy morning after Sally left.

He was to have an appointment with Dr. Peterson at eleven, and for the hour or two before, he had been wondering whether or not he would talk frankly, tell the truth about the problem he was facing, tell the man of his past and hope for help in the future. Surely a psychologist, such as Dr. Peterson doubtless was, must have had vast experience of unusual people and peculiar backgrounds. And to be successful he must be credulous and sympathetic. As a matter of fact, Haroot thought, perhaps he had been sent here to this very place because Dr. Peterson was the one person who could understand and help him. Perhaps it was intended that Haroot might at last have a friend and an ally. That was such a delightful, such an exciting possibility that Haroot was full of almost tremuluous anticipation when he knocked at the door of the doctor's study. He saw himself fairly unburdening his soul and Dr. Peterson saying:

"Well, now, that's most interesting. Yes, I've known of a case like yours before. But as to this problem and the danger that is threatening the country—that is serious, my dear man. We'll have to get to work on warnings immediately—"

The office door opened to him and he went into a room that was devoid of all traditional medical appurtenances. There were no large, alarming scientific books about Diseases of the Spine or Diseases of Women. There was no smell of lysol—there was not even any broad mahogany desk. There was a copy of Michelangelo's creation of Adam above the mantel. There were nasturtiums in a gold bronze bowl on a table in the window; there was an open fire and two deep chairs before it, and more apples in a bowl upon a table beside the chairs.

"Mr. Bingham, how do you do—bad morning, isn't it? Sit down, won't you? Have an apple. I always take one at eleven. Well, I see that England is objecting to this naval suggestion. What do you think about it?"

"I don't blame them in the least," Haroot

said, and sat down. He wondered how Dr. Peterson was going to get from England's naval policy to a discussion of his own troubles. They had got off on the wrong foot, he thought, and determined to give no help in getting into step.

It would be amusing to see how the man got to his point. He was a short fat man with eyes that were inclined to bulge and with scant fair hair that revealed a large expanse of noble brow. He seemed a kindly little man, a rather fussy little man, and as he talked about England's foreign policy and the difficulties between nations and the basic trouble and the cause of wars being the fact that nations could not get together in easy chairs and discuss everything frankly.

Haroot felt a premonition of distrust. This man would never understand him in the world. And yet he was clever. From battleships and cannon he had in two minutes arrived at the advisability of frank confession. It was almost disturbing, and Haroot decided to lead the man back to his nations for a little while.

He took a large bite of apple and said that he quite agreed with Dr. Peterson. It was an interesting line of thought that he had opened, nations as individuals. The cartoonists always saw them as that. They were ahead of the rest of the public in that respect. France now, what a charming person she was.

"But England and America," he said, "sometimes England is John Bull and sometimes Britannia; and it's the same with America, isn't it?—Uncle Sam and Columbia. Did you ever think of that? They have dual personalities. Of course Britannia is a bit dictatorial—all that insistence upon ruling the waves—but she is quite a winner, and Columbia too. If you got them around a fire now, France and Britannia and Columbia, all eating apples —no, but they wouldn't be eating apples, they'd be too much afraid of getting fat. They all have good figures."

He chuckled, and wondered how poor stranded Dr. Peterson would ever get back to the frank discussions of his own soul.

"Very amusing—quite—quite," Dr. Peterson said, and gave the impression for a second of a man floundering. "Curious, isn't it, all this preoccupation of women about weight and their figures? A bad sign, rather, anything that tends to tamper with the normal rhythm of existence. Women past thirty at least were meant to be fat."

"How about primitive women, working in the fields and all that?"

"True, true, but we are a long way from the primitive. And yet there it is, far beneath, a dark subterranean flood flowing. Sweeping with it our urges and desires. . . . Curious, it only comes to the surface in our dreams. . . . Strange things dreams are—"

So he was one of these dream men, was he? Benjy ate more apple, and watched the fire, and nodded his head, reflectively, as if he agreed with every word that Dr. Peterson uttered. "The man imagines himself an oracle," he thought. "Now he is going to give up subtle approaches and try direct action on me."

"How about you—are you troubled much with dreams?" Dr. Peterson took an apple himself, then held it in his teeth while he bent to the fire to put on another log.

"Yes," said Haroot, "I am. I have a recurrent dream that I've often wanted to consult somebody about. It always seems to come in my first sleep—my heaviest. It's rather absurd—I hesitate to tell it."

"Go ahead, my dear man, go ahead. There's nothing you can say that can shock me."

"Well, it isn't exactly shocking. At least it doesn't seem shocking to me, but of course I know you can't tell—I mean a layman can't tell the interpretation." He took another bite of apple, and Dr. Peterson's eyes seemed to bulge of fraction more.

"True—well, perhaps I can help with the interpretation."

"I'd be most awfully relieved if you could—I've wrought him up to a pitch now," Haroot thought, and said, as though revealing the inmost secrets of his heart, "Well, you see, night after night I dream about a sparrow. Under one wing he carries a pile of newspapers, and he is always wearing immaculate white spats."

FOR a second there was silence. Haroot gazed at the fire and wondered if Dr. Peterson would arise and smite him on the head with the tongs or shovel. He would have liked to laugh, if there had been any one to laugh with. He looked at Dr. Peterson and saw that gentleman stretched out on his chair engaged in solemn contemplation, his half-eaten apple on the plate beside him, his finger-tips together.

"Very interesting," he said, "most interesting indeed."

"I don't doubt it," Haroot said. "I've always felt so. 'It wasn't the words that

frightened the birds, 'twas the terrible *double entendre.*'"

"Quite, quite—you've hit the nail on the head exactly." Dr. Peterson was almost jubilant. "That's it. It's not the words, but it's what lies under the words. Behind the dream is the frustrated wish—"

"No, no," Haroot protested, alarmed. "I got hit on the head with a mast and have been a bit seedy ever since. If you heard anything from my wife's doctor—I was talking symbolically with him one day and he read more into it than he should have. All nonsense. I came up here to get a rest and lose some flesh and gain some muscle."

Not for anything in the world would Haroot discuss his hopes, his love for Sally, with this unpleasant person who believed in dreams and apples. Imagine revealing to him Sally's attitude on certain subjects, laying her open, perhaps, to criticism. But the doctor was clever. In spite of himself, Haroot had been led right to the conversational opening that Dr. Peterson wanted. But no further would he go. Not one step further. He kept to his decision, and during the rest of the interview Dr. Peterson found himself merely laying out a routine of days and diet.

"Plenty of resting out in the sun," Dr. Peterson said. "And let your mind lie fallow. Don't bother yourself with abstruse theological questions. The world wags on very comfortably, my dear fellow. We don't have to take all of its problems on our shoulders."

"That's where you're wrong, Dr. Peterson," Haroot said. "We're afraid to think, but if we did think, did face the situation, we'd—" He caught himself up, on the verge of simply bursting out with the whole thing. "What a fool I am," he thought. "My tongue *is* hung in the middle."

"What would we do?" the doctor asked. They were standing by the door at the moment.

"We would take an active interest in politics—support only the best men, make every vote count." It was amusing to sense the doctor's disappointment. Poor man, he had been intensely expecting some dramatic revelation of mental derangement. It was as if he had been anticipating the taste of a fine psychological *hors d'oeuvre* and had found himself with a mouthful of thick sustaining bread and butter. His forehead grew a little red, with anger perhaps, or frustration, but he said:

"Exactly, Mr. Bingham, exactly. I'm glad to see that you have such an interest in politics. The hope of the country lies in the individual. Plenty of rest in the sun now, my dear fellow, and order more apples any time you want."

With that as a benediction the interview ended, and Haroot went down to his salt steaming bath. It was pleasant, while luxuriating in it, to think that he had completely baffled the worthy doctor. "I ran him around in circles," Haroot thought, and then wished that the tub were a trifle longer so that he might float in it. But then water would get in his ears perhaps, and he could not see himself hopping about on one foot to shake it out. Such an endeavor would probably be considered a symptom, and reported. How ridiculous!

He really believed that he was getting thinner. If he did, perhaps Sally would like him better. When he had successfully accomplished this business of throwing the monkey-wrench into Iblees' plans he would go back to Salt-mere and find a way to make Sally love him. And then, if she wanted him to, he would go into politics and cultivate a clever "line of talk" for dinner-parties; but not too clever. He wanted no more Olga Vanes. Still, he saw himself the center of an amused group of women in charming evening dresses and Sally somewhere in the offing regarding him with pride.

It was a delightful fancy, and he indulged it wafting his body gently up and down in the water, until a salt drop got in his eye and stung it and he grabbed for his towel and immersed the end. Then he had to dry himself with the wet end and corner flapping coldly against him every other minute, a sensation he hated, so the joy of the bath was shattered by the time the attendant came in the booth to give him his oil and alcohol rub.

AFTER that day of the interview with the doctor, time passed in a very dull routine of nourishment and exercise and violet ray lamp-treatments and rest. Perhaps it was the air of the place, or the relaxing influence of the salt-baths, or the strain that he had been through—whatever the reason, Haroot found himself in an unpleasant state of exhaustion. In fact by night he was so tired that it was a distinct effort to wind his watch. But in spite of such weariness he was sleeping badly. Some nights he lay awake until the roosters crowed in some distant farm be-

yond the hills. On such nights he would try to comfort himself with thoughts of Sally and the children, plan for that day when he would be back in the garden with the hollyhocks and delphinium and snapdragons and the blue view of windy bay.

He would walk down the path, with Grandma arching by the side of his ankles, and Timmy and Robin and Alice-Anne would see him and turn with shouts and run towards him, jubilant. And they would leap into his arms, and he and the children and the small black cat would be entangled in one gay, ecstatic tussle—warm arms, quick kisses. And Sally would come towards them smiling, flushed and happy from her weeding, a smudge of earth across one cheek rendering her human and approachable, and she would put her arms about his neck and kiss him.

No, that she would not do. She would tell Alice-Anne to get up from the ground, her clean dress was getting all grass-stained. How her spirit of practicality burst in and ruined such moments of beauty, as when he had dropped his armful of bottles in the middle of the *Moonlight Sonata*. Maddening, ridiculous. Always there was old Dame Incongruity sitting beside you. When you leapt from your seat for some impassioned enthusiasm she grabbed you by the coat-tails and jerked you down.

Life was a queer thing. And here he was, Haroot realized, so involved in his present existence, caring so desperately, clinging so frantically to his precarious fingerholds upon it, that the affairs of the universe were dwarfed in comparison. Quite frankly it was of greater importance to him that he might some day persuade Sally to kiss him with full ardor and generosity than were all the machinations of Iblees against the future of mankind. And that was wrong and incredible. Much as he would like to sit at home in his garden at Salt-mere, he could not. He could not allow this unknown evil god to be placed in power in the world. The time was ripe—one was blind who could not see it. What was the meaning of empty churches, the drunkenness and dishonor in the highest places? A little more of the rotting of the moral fiber and Iblees could crown his god and plunge the world in darkness.

No, the word of danger must be carried to The Highest—to the very gates and further. Idiots, these people who frittered their time away at bridge and dinners. Not a moment should be lost—the word of danger must be taken. And that, Haroot realized, was the problem. How could the word be sent?

Here he was, imprisoned in a pale, stout body, chained to the earth by inconvenient but necessary laws of gravity. He could not now launch himself upon the howling winds. He could not, as he would have liked, race, swift across the midnight sky, writing alarm in monstrous words of flame. Nor could he stand upon the roof-top of the house and cry aloud to God.

There seemed no way to reach the ear of any supernatural being. Even the djinns and fiends had quite deserted him. Poor Haroot lay, day after day, in the long chair on his balcony, wrapped in steamer-rugs, watching the trees on the hillside in front of him, sniffing, occasionally, the good tang of smoke of bonfires, and alternately reading Conrad and sending forth silent supplications for some supernatural creature to come and talk to him and give him help. He had come upon Noah so easily and unexpectedly and, after all, Noah had not been of the slightest use or significance. He had at the time simply been annoyed at the old man's pessimistic attitude.

But now he would hail even Noah with joy. It seemed as if he had been abandoned by all hope whatever. Pray as he would, there was no answer. The days went marching by, and he grew more tired, more disheartened and worried. Soon Iblees would be sending for him again, asking what the mischief he meant by all this delay and procrastination. Soon, unless something happened, Haroot would find himself with this horrible young god of evil foisted upon him, with the necessity of instructing him in elementary miracles and magic. Who would the god of evil be?

If Haroot should fling himself from the balcony, would that then release his soul from its chain of gravity sufficiently for him to scurry off to find his way to The Highest at once? He considered it seriously for several hours until he realized that he certainly would not immediately be released under any special dispensation.

There was always such a tremendous amount of red tape to be untangled in regard to people who took their own lives. It mixed up things so, complicated the whole scheme of existence and nearly drove Azrael out of his mind. He remembered Azrael rushing about as if distracted, one evening, saying, "Five hundred and sixteen suicides today—the half of them in China—well, they'll just have to wait till

we can sort them out and look into their records. No patience and self-control whatever. Can't wait till they're sent for properly."

No, it would not do for him to fling himself over the edge of the balcony. He would lie still in his chair and read Conrad and try neither to think too much of Sally nor to worry. But he did wish that the sun would shine more. It was all very well for Dr. Peterson to say, "Bask in the sun, my dear fellow; let your mind lie fallow." How can you bask if there is no sun to bask in? It seemed to be always cloudy at Allyntown. Great gray clouds banking up above the hill behind the house, then rolling over, gray shreds breaking loose and blowing along, shifting, changing, taking shapes of mountains, of islands, of castles, of djinns, of horses.

It was five o'clock, one Sunday afternoon, when the Valkyr came plunging down out of the clouds.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHAT is she going to do with her horse?" Haroot wondered, and saw, to his dismay, that she was apparently intending to land on the balcony by his side. But there wouldn't be room enough. It was not a large balcony. His long hair extended over most of it, and he had no desire to have the horse's forefeet in his lap. All those Valkyr sisters were impetuous and foolhardy, and quite devoid of a sense of scale. Imagine the woman's even thinking she could jam her horse into that little space.

He sat up in his long chair, and it promptly closed up on his back, but he waved at the Valkyr, attempting to indicate that she must park her horse elsewhere. Still she came dashing toward him, and then suddenly drew up the animal when it was just a few feet from the balcony. It rested its front hoofs on the iron railing and pawed wildly, beating the air with its wings, and Haroot said:

"For Heaven's sake, don't let him do that. He'll have the whole thing over and they'll think I did it."

"Then where'll I put him?" she said. "Stop it, darling, don't claw the rail like that. He hates to stand still, you see, when there isn't anything under him."

"That's quite obvious. Take him off somewhere and tie him up."

"But where? I came especially to talk to you. I'm Gerhilde the Valkyr."

"I'm delighted to see you, but you can't talk like that. Great grief, don't let him wave his hooves so. There's a roof over there above the store-rooms; put him on that, and don't let him clatter."

"I don't think you half appreciate him," she said. "Come on, darling," and she pulled the horse away from the railing, to Haroot's extreme relief. "And after I've parked him how can I get back to you?" she called. The horse was poised in the air, waving its wings up and down with short fluttery motions, as if he were treading water, and the Valkyr looked quite worried.

"There are fire-escapes all over the place," Haroot said. "I'll join you on that roof if you want me to. You can tie your beast to that hook in the chimney."

"He's not a beast, he's a darling," she said, and wheeled her horse and rode it to the store-room roof.

"I'll take my steamer-rug and book along," Haroot thought, "in case they find me over there and wonder what the deuce I'm doing. I can tell them I came over to get out of the wind." And it was a perfectly reasonable place to go to, if only it were conventional for people ever to wander about roofs. Haroot had to climb up one flight of fire-escape stairs, cross a few feet of main roof, and go down another short fire-escape. Nothing easier, except that his steamer-rug dragged and tangled in his legs going up the stairs.

He stood at the top of the others for a moment, looking down at the Valkyr as she tied her horse up to the hook that was sticking out of the chimney. "Too fat," he thought, "and those long flowing skirts are awfully out of date." Moreover, her breastplate and winged helmet looked cumbersome and theatrical. He thought of Sally as she looked when she was riding—tan boots, trim brown breeches, white silk shirt, and brown silk necktie, and her fair hair brushed so charmingly away from her face.

You could never think of Sally as dashing through the air shouting, *"Ho-jo-to-ho!"* But there was a sincerity about Sally, a fineness, a human intangible beauty that the other lacked. Though perhaps it was that Haroot was in love with Sally and had never been especially attracted to the Teutonic solidity of the Northern hierarchy of gods.

Still, he was delighted to see the Valkyr. He was, to tell the truth, elated. He had not been completely abandoned, as he had

thought. His supplications had been heard, and answered. What did it matter if the Valkyr were not particularly attractive to him? At least she was intelligent, presumably, and would help him in his frustrating of Iblees' plans.

"I'll put the steamer-rug in the lee of this wall," he said, "so the wind won't get at us. Don't you want to take off your helmet? It looks horribly uncomfortable."

"No; my hair's a sight," she said. "I washed it yesterday. Do you think darling will pull that hook loose?"

"No; it's as firm as the house. I say, it's awfully good to see you. How did you happen to come? Were you sent?"

"Well, yes and no. I said it was a shame to leave you here and not pay any attention to you when you were clamoring so for somebody. But everybody was very busy. They're getting up enormous fêtes and pageants for the transatlantic aviators who went down, you know."

"Poor souls," Haroot pitied them. "It'll be worse than the crowds and excitement in New York. I suppose they're to be drawn through the celestial streets in chariots, with the lesser angels blowing gold trumpets before them, and they'll be pelted with flowers. I remember Pasteur's triumph, and the poor man didn't really enjoy it."

"No; when they're worth anything they fairly hate it."

"I wouldn't let them give me a triumph for a good deal," Haroot said.

"Small chance," the Valkyr said. "You're pretty well out of favor at present."

POOR Haroot was disheartened. He felt as cast down as he did when Sally looked at him coldly. "I suppose I am," he said. "And it's too bad, too, when I need all the influence I can possibly get. Well, you'll simply have to help me, that's all there is about it. I've got to take a message to The Highest."

"That won't be any too easy," she said. "What's your message, Haroot? Or is it a secret?"

"No, it's not a secret. Iblees is just about to establish a new god over the world."

The Valkyr yawned and leaned against the wall behind her, and the back of her helmet made a scratching sound against the stucco. "He's always threatening that," she said. "Is that what you've been raising such a tumult over? I think you've gone neurotic, Haroot. You certainly look a bit flabby."

"I'm not in the least neurotic." He was hurt and angry. "And I'm not really flabby at all, at least not very. You should see me ride the electric horse."

The Valkyr lowered her lids over her China-blue eyes and looked at him in laughing derision. "Why not ride the electric horse through the celestial regions?" she suggested. "It would be as good as a triumph—nearly."

"Don't be so cursed flippant," he said. "This is serious. I may find myself saddled with that beastly god of his at any minute. I rather think it will be one of his five sons, but as a human, of course; and my job is to be a forerunner and to teach the creature how to do a little magic, a few miracles."

"Well, what makes you take it all so seriously?" she asked. "Why, you're all wrought up about it, Haroot."

"Wrought up? Of course I'm wrought up. Don't you see what it will involve—the downfall of the present religion?"

"I suppose," she interrupted him, "that you wouldn't take it so hard if you were a god of a downfallen religion as I am. Then you'd see that it didn't matter so much. That things ran along more or less as they always had run along. Of course it's hard at first. I've always had a great deal of sympathy for the Russian aristocrats running taxis in Paris. In fact, for a long time, I used to keep special watch over them and bring some of them to a corner of Valhalla that we've restored. I only brought the ones who were hurt in accidents and things."

"But that wasn't right, you know." Haroot was astounded. "If they were orthodox Russians it must have been a horrid shock to them to wake up in a perfect flock of Norse goddesses, and find themselves in a corner of Valhalla."

"It was, to some," she admitted. "But they usually got over it quickly. Perhaps I had something to do with it. And most of them were agnostics, anyway, and the few orthodox ones who made a fuss, I had to take back to their own purgatory."

"Then if you know the way to Purgatory, you surely know the road to the celestial regions," Haroot said. "Won't you please take me as quickly as possible? Come on now; I say, it's really awfully serious."

"But why is it?" she said. "Don't let your hand shake so, Haroot. Tell me, just what did Iblees say?"

"All right," Haroot said. "Then I'll tell you. Here, put this corner of the steamer-rug over us. Well, he started in by saying that he wanted to extend his scope of influence, to expand, to sell himself to humanity."

"What in the world does that mean?" the Valkyr interrupted.

"To sell yourself? Nothing really. It's just current slang. Well, he went on in that line. Of course he never talks straight out, you know. He's always beating about bushes. And I'll tell you the bushes, and you see if it isn't appalling. It is. There's no other word for it—"

"Well, go ahead and tell me," she said. "It's getting late."

"All right," Haroot said. "Perhaps you'd like a cigarette while I'm talking. It'll warm us up."

He lighted a cigarette for her and they sat close together, wrapped as much as possible in the rug. The horse had apparently resigned itself to its fate and was standing with head down near the chimney, seeming to sleep, or at least, ruminating with more or less contentment. Its wings were folded and lay slanting against its back.

The Valkyr smoked and flipped ashes off her cigarette and listened, and Haroot told her of his interview with Iblees, of all that Iblees had said and all that he had implied and all that he had commanded, and Valkyr nodded her head and flipped the butt of the cigarette over the edge of the roof.

"You're right, it is serious," she said. "When he gets down to anything definite like that list he means business."

"I am glad that you see it," Haroot said; and he felt like weeping at the relief of having somebody understand and appreciate the problem. It was as if a stone rolled off his chest and the pain of breathing again were almost more than one could bear. "And you do see, don't you, that it would simply mean the crashing into ruins of civilization. He nearly succeeded, in the war to end war, when he had that bullet shot in the Balkans. But this will be worse."

"Oh, yes, far worse," the Valkyr agreed.

"When can we start?" Haroot asked. "Now—we shouldn't lose a minute."

"Not until the morning," she answered with firmness. "My poor darling is too tired to start off on such a trip at this hour. Besides, look at it; it's almost dark. Shouldn't you be going in to dinner or something?"

He groaned. "Indeed, I should. Dinner, and then hymns afterward. The most dreary doleful hymns. Everybody gets around in the living-room and tells their favorite numbers, and then they all drone out hymns that make you want to howl. And they end with, 'Now the day is over,' and you want to get out and drown yourself. Why can't we start now? They'll never know I've gone. I'll be back in time, anyway. There isn't any time in the celestial regions."

"Yes, but it'll take a little time to get there. You ought to allow an afternoon, anyway. Make it tomorrow afternoon. No, I will not start tonight, Haroot. Go in and eat a good dinner and skip the hymns. Go to bed with a nice detective story to take your mind off your troubles."

"That's a good thought," he said. "Perhaps I will."

Her kindness was very touching to Haroot. Personally, she did not appeal to him. She was too large, too untidy, too exuberant in a way. Sally was so much finer—so fastidious and so full of illusive charm. But the Valkyr had a good heart, and Haroot was tremendously grateful that she had come to help him out of his troubles.

THEY had risen from their steamer-rug and were trying to unfasten the horse. It was almost dark now, steel-gray and windy on the roof there. The horse had pulled the knot of his hitching-rope tight, and as Haroot struggled to unfasten it the beast was restless and its mane kept blowing in his face. The Valkyr had mounted and was impatient to be off, and the horse stamped and just grazed Haroot's foot, and his fingers were almost stiff with cold.

"Be still, you brute you," he said.

"You mustn't call him a brute, he's a darling," the Valkyr rebuked him.

"All right, be still, you darling—curse you. The darling nearly nipped my fingers, Gerhilde. You women never do know how to tie a knot, do you? There you are. I do appreciate your coming most awfully, Gerhilde. Tomorrow afternoon then?"

"Yes, tomorrow afternoon. Avoid the hymns, Haroot—good night." To his dismay as the shadow of the horse leaped past him, the Valkyr leaned from her saddle, and a kiss brushed across his cheek.

"Of course she is very warm-hearted and impetuous," he thought, as he wiped the kiss off with his sleeve. "I suppose all those girls were." But he was a little troubled. He folded the steamer-rug and

started up the fire-escape, and as he stood on the roof, down from the clouds rang her call. "Foolish!" he thought. "What if they heard it? Perhaps they'll think it was some nurse or other." Then he chuckled at the vision of a crisp and white-capped nurse bursting suddenly into the glorious song of the Valkyrs.

The valley was filled with lines of gold lights, shimmering, and above him dark gray clouds sped across the sky and disappeared beyond the hill. And one cloud was a horse with wings, and a figure on it. The rush and gallop of its hooves came to him faintly; and faintly, once again he heard the Valkyr's cry.

He was not able to attend the hymns. After dinner Dr. Peterson stopped by his table and escorted him out of the dining-room, clinging affectionately to his arm. The doctor had taken quite a fancy to Haroot and frequently would join him at his table for coffee and a cigarette. He labored under a delusion that Haroot was keenly interested in politics, which, after all, was a far more agreeable topic of conversation than dreams. So, to keep his end up, Haroot had been obliged to read the papers assiduously each morning and fan within himself entirely fictitious but vehement likes and prejudices. He had neglected to ask Miss Wrinkle about Benjy Bingham's political views and so now was obliged to stand on his own feet.

He decided to be a Democrat because Dr. Peterson was a Republican, and for the same reason was an ardent enthusiast for the League of Nations and Mussolini and Farm Relief. He found it great fun to argue with the doctor. He could leave the poor man mentally flat and gasping in a few minutes, when it came to politics. But there was one feeble old duffer, who pottered about the halls and played endless games of Canfield, who could completely floor Haroot at his League of Nations and Farm Relief. He was waiting for him as they came out of the dining-room, and thrust a marked copy of a newspaper in his face, ejaculating, "Look at this now—look at this, my dear sir. Now what do you think of Mussolini?"

Mussolini was the last person in the world whom Haroot had any desire to think of at all that evening. He wanted to go up to his room and plan the trip he was to take tomorrow with the Valkyr. But with the doctor on one side and the excited aged man on the other, he had to suffer himself docilely to be led into a corner by the fire, there to discuss the policies of International Trade until it was time to go off and sing dreary and distressing hymns. But for once they were not unendurable, for all the time that he was sharing a hymn-book with the aged gentleman, and singing, quite mechanically, such phrases as, *"Christian dost thou see them—how they strew the ground,"* he was thinking that immediately after lunch tomorrow he would go out on the balcony and watch for Gerhilde, and they would start off the minute she came.

But then the annoying consideration came to him that he had nothing suitable to wear. He couldn't expect to get back his quartz illusion of a body, and how could he possibly go through the celestial regions dressed in a dark blue serge business suit, with blue striped necktie and tan calf shoes? And a sport-suit, with knickerbockers, would be infinitely worse. Imagine riding the Valkyr's horse in a business suit, or even golf trousers and sweater. No, he would have to fashion some sort of a tunic.

Fortunately, his skin was quite beautifully tanned by the violet ray lamp treatments he had been having, so he would not be ashamed to appear in a tunic. It must be long enough so he could wear flannels beneath, because this body of Benjy Bingham's was unpleasantly sensitive to changes of temperature. As for the tunic—they were singing now, *"Ten thousand times ten thousand, in glistening raiment white,"*—white tunics aren't bad. He could knock up something or other out of bath-towels, perhaps. Sally had put a little sewing-kit in his trunk, for buttons. And she had also put in a strip of flowery stuff of some sort that he had thought utter nonsense but she had insisted upon bringing along because she said that often it was very nice to be able to have a table-cover of your own, or a laundry-bag, or an extra curtain.

That was just the thing for a tunic. It was rather flamboyant—black circles on a gold ground, with green and silver birds of paradise perched upon and flitting about among the circles, and morning-glories were woven into the design somewhere. But it was gay and suitable for the celestial regions. Better than bath towels, really. He must go upstairs and make the thing at once.

They were singing, *"Shadows of the evening, steal a-cro-oss the sky—y—,"* and he thought of Gerhilde shouting back at him the Valkyr's song. A rash woman! And

that kiss! The trip would not be without its incidents. And the tunic would be most becoming to him, too!

The hymns ended. Everyone was getting up, rustling, murmuring polite things, laughing.

"You're looking seventy-five percent better than you were when you came here, my dear fellow," the doctor was saying to him.

He smiled. For the first time in months he was not ashamed of the body of Benjy Bingham.

"I have an article about Farm Relief, Mr. Bingham, if you care to stop in my room." The aged man was importuning him, but Haroot said:

"Thanks—in the morning—good night." He escaped from the group and fled to his own room. The flowery stuff, when he spread it on the bed, was truly gorgeous, and silky so that it would hang in pleasant folds and lines. He threw it over one shoulder and looked in the glass, and he seemed to see there not so much the unpleasant fat, pale features of Benjy Bingham, but the agreeable, handsome suggestion of the Haroot of old.

That night, for the first time since he came to Dr. Peterson's, he was not tired, and that night, too, he dropped off to sleep as soon as he got into bed.

HE SWALLOWED his lunch down with all speed the next day and even omitted dessert for fear Dr. Peterson would come and join him and ask him what he thought of Will Rogers. But as Haroot was hurrying upstairs, he regretted having had to rush so. There had been chocolate éclairs, large creamy ones, the only thing, except oatmeal, that the chef was able to cook decently. They had them every Monday and Friday for lunch. Still Haroot could not risk keeping Gerhilde waiting or jeopardize the celestial regions for a mere éclair. She might shout her Valkyr's song at any moment, to hurry him up, and although she would, of course, be invisible, she would not be inaudible and then there might be the deuce to pay. No, he must be dressed and ready and waiting on the balcony.

As for being dressed, he had made an excellent job of the tunic. It just covered his flannels and blended beautifully with the tan on his legs and arms. The stuff was perhaps a shade too modern and exotic, but it was striking and becoming. And Benjy Bingham's face was undeniably thinner than it had been. Not such an impossible face when it was happy and interested. If he should run across any of his old friends, the saints and martyrs that he used to meet at Saint Cecelia's, perhaps they would not be completely shocked at his appearance. In fact, they might think him rather admirable. His profile wasn't so bad now.

He was studying it in the glass when some one knocked at his door. "Good grief!" he thought, "if they catch me like this I'm done for." The whole realization of the consequences flashed across his mind. He would be put to bed with a thermometer in his mouth and an ice-bag on his head— a nurse would sit beside him—the trip with the Valkyr would be impossible. Iblees would continue his plans unchecked—mankind would crash to ruin! "All because of my beastly pride," he thought, sick with terror, and grabbed his overcoat and flung it on, just as the door opened.

It was a nurse with a bottle of tonic. They always marched in like that, sometimes scarcely even knocking. Perhaps he could curl his legs up under his overcoat. She seemed to be regarding them with an odd look. He felt his teeth afflicted with an overpowering impulse to knock together. But he restrained them and said sternly:

"I was dressing. I did not say, 'Come in.'"

"*I'm* sorry," she said lightly. "Here's your new tonic, Mr. Bingham. Dr. Peterson says that you won't need more than a teaspoonful after meals now. Why, it isn't your bath hour, is it?"

"No, it is not," he said, with dignity; and thought, "If she finds out now, they'll think I'm mad and incarcerate me." And he clenched his hands and prayed that the woman would take herself off. But she did not.

She put the bottle down on his washstand and, to his horror, he saw she was looking at him in the mirror. A corner of his tunic was showing, a flamboyant bird of paradise winging across the large circle of black. He was lost.

"Yes," he said, and felt as if he were a stone image speaking, "it's quite mad, isn't it?" He stood up and threw off his overcoat. "Here's where Benjy Bingham dies of fright," he thought. But Haroot would not fall in defeat without a word at least. He crossed his arms and looked down at the nurse. She was a red-haired, rather small person, and at the moment she

looked aghast. "It's quite good, isn't it?" he said, and turned and admired himself in the mirror. "I made it myself out of some stuff my wife put in my trunk for a laundry bag. I was thinking," and he made his tones burn with rebuke, "before you burst in and gummed it all up, of wearing it to the masquerade dance you nurses are having on Friday. Now, of course, I've had all that bother for nothing."

He had won. The nurse looked crushed. "Oh, Mr. Bingham," she said, "I *am* sorry. Do wear it though. It's perfectly beautiful. Why, you're wonderful in it. Awfully Roman. If you tied a ribbon around your hair you'd be exactly like a charioteer or an emperor or something. Do wear it. I wouldn't tell a soul—of course, the patients aren't supposed to come, really; but sometimes they do sneak in—and you would be wonderful. I tell you. You go as that, and I'll go as a Roman slave."

"This woman is almost as bad as Olga Vane and Gerhilde," he thought. "I seem to have an irresistible attraction for all of them except for Sally."

"I have some silver bracelets I wear above my elbow," she went on. "It would be fun, Mr. Bingham."

"Well, we'll see about it," he said. "But the next time, don't go barging into a man's room like that."

The Valkyr's call came to them, clear even through the window.

"What's that?" the nurse said. "I heard that noise last night, just before dinner. Somebody thinks they're singing." She giggled. "Well, so long, Mr. Bingham. Don't forget Friday night, now." Then she was gone, and Haroot found himself trembling and so weak from his alarm, that he had to sit down on the edge of his bed. But he could not stay there for more than a second. Gerhilde might begin shouting again. She was evidently a very impatient person, and Haroot was in terror lest something else should turn up at the last moment and drag him back. He slipped his overcoat on and stepped out on his balcony just in time to see Gerhilde ride around the corner of the house.

"I've circled three times already," she said, accusingly. "The darling won't stand still at all this afternoon. You're awfully late. I nearly rode away."

"I couldn't help it," Haroot said.

"Well, hop on now," she said. "I'll ride up close to the rail and you get on. Better ride behind me."

"I—" He was indignant. "Do you think that's any place for a man to ride? I will not!"

"All right, I'll leave you, then." The horse was pawing the air again in its absurd treading-water manner, and Gerhilde looked not only determined but annoyed.

"Oh, all right, all right. Just till we get off then," Haroot said, and as she wheeled the horse alongside the balcony he climbed the rail, tossed his overcoat down on his long chair, and took his place with his arms around Gerhilde's waist. The horse plunged at feeling Haroot's extra weight, scraped his leg against the railing and was off, galloping wildly, slanting upward toward the clouds above the hill.

HOUSES and trees and fields were far and small below them as they went through clouds and came out in the sun. And there was a floor of clouds below them, and the floor shifted, and Haroot looked down to distant clear blue water edged by a narrow line of white that was the waves. Clouds passed below them like soft islands, and beneath in the still remote blue a toy ship seemed to hang, with tiny sails all spread for flight.

"Glorious!" Haroot said. "I say, Gerhilde, when are we going to change and you ride pillion?" He had to shout above the rushing of the wind, and the horse was galloping up and down the hills of air currents, swooping down vast unseen slopes and climbing shorter steeps beyond, with almost the motion of a boat. Haroot might have been sea-sick had he not been enraptured. "This is great," he said, "but, I say, we've got to change pretty soon, you know. I can't go through the celestial regions hanging on to you like a fool."

"I don't see why not," she shouted back at him.

"Well, I won't," he yelled. "That's flat. It's not dignified."

"You're too conceited," she shouted.

"Maybe," he said. "But we're going to change."

"Not in mid-air," she called. "You're crazy, Haroot."

Below them, now, fields were checkered in green and dull bronze gold, with lines of tiny trees, bright-colored in their autumn-reds and yellows, and a car, as small as an ant, crawled along a long white road.

"Sit still, Haroot," Gerhilde insisted, and turned her head to glare at him; and the horse, annoyed, turned sideways and the earth tilted as if fields and trees and houses would slide off the table of its sur-

face and lie jumbled in some far and unknown corner of the universe, in a ruined, broken heap.

"Good glory! look what you're about, woman," he shouted, and she said:

"It's perfectly all right, Haroot, only it bothers the darling when there's any sort of unpleasantness or friction on his back. It's lucky he didn't begin to buck. If you'll sit still for just a little while I'll take you to Valhalla and we'll get Brunhilde's horse for you. It's been in pasture there for a long time now, but it still has some life in it."

"That would be great," he said. "Gerhilde, you are a good sport. I'm awfully obliged to you."

"That's all right. Do keep still now; it makes my throat sore to shout so."

So he kept still and enjoyed the ride, only he would have enjoyed it more if her long blond hair had not kept blowing all over him. She should certainly, he thought, have had it trimmed or at least used a hair-net. Some of the Valkyr's sisters, as he remembered, had braided their hair in two long yellow braids. Much better. Perhaps he could suggest it to Gerhilde after a day or so.

The character of the sky about them was changing. They had been riding higher and higher, and the earth had changed to a map below them and from a map had become a globe and from the globe, thick gray clouds had gathered and cut them off and now they were alone in vacant stretches of gray space. But clouds—or were they mountains?—rose before them, misty at first, then clearer and more solid—great rocky barren cliffs, forbidding and alarming. And on the summit of a cliff there seemed to be a ruined tower, a crumbling wall with arches that you looked through onto emptiness and sky beyond.

"There we are, that's Valhalla," Gerhilde said, and pointed toward it.

"Oh, really—tremendous place, isn't it? —awfully—fascinating—" It was almost impossible to be even politely enthusiastic. When a young lady points out her home to you with such evident pride, you are under an obligation to make some agreeable remark about it. And although Haroot realized that fully, Valhalla impressed him as being about the most grim and melancholy spot he had ever chanced upon. Still, if Gerhilde were satisfied, who was he to be depressed by its grimness?

Nevertheless, it was forlorn. They had landed in an open courtyard behind those ruined arches. Once they seemed to have been cloisters of some sort, and a great wall must have risen in towers and battlements above the cliffs. Now it was broken and fallen, and the courtyard was half full of vast hills of crumbled stone. Weeds and grass were covering the gray heaps with greenish patches, and before many years should pass they would be only hills of grass with daisies and buttercups blowing in the wind. Daisies and buttercups were blowing now in the grass of that part of the courtyard where Gerhilde had landed, and the horse was cropping them and the Valkyr was rubbing down his flanks with a handful of weeds.

"A most interesting place," Haroot said. He was looking out through one of the arches along that which had evidently been the front of the building. It was dreadfully ruined, gutted as if by fire, the vacant windows like blind, staring eyes. And everywhere were heaps of fallen rock and hanging beams and masses of green shiny ivy.

You could see right through broken doorways into green yards that had once been banquet-halls. Along the front there had been lawns with neat trim paths and a fountain. But now the lawns were hayfields and the paths were weed-grown tracks, and a broken statue had fallen into the dry basin of the fountain beneath a sighing oak.

"Over there is where the end of the rainbow bridge was." Gerhilde was beside him, pointing. "The ground drops down there to the earth."

He shivered at the thought of such distance, and said, "Too bad the bridge has gone."

"Yes," she agreed. "Sometimes on a clear day you can see where bits of the rainbow rubbed off against the rock it was fastened to. It's quite a sight. People come from all over to see it. We charge a shilling a look. And we charge, too, for seeing through the palace and the grounds. But we wouldn't charge you, of course. You're my guest."

"Awfully good of you," he said. But not for anything would he have gone through those desolate halls or viewed that rubbed-off bit of rainbow, though curiously Gerhilde seemed quite unaffected, almost jolly about it.

Well, probably she was used to it.

"Who are all those people over there?" he asked.

No, there was no hope . . . in a minute the gates would open, slowly, and he would pass through.

AT THE far end of the ruins there seemed to be a small patch of smooth green lawn, and there a group of people were gathered; some on benches, sitting, some standing, moving slowly about. He listened, heard laughter, voices, then the click of wood against a ball.

"They're playing croquet," Gerhilde said. "They have a tournament every Monday. It's great fun. Do you want to join it?"

He didn't. With all his heart he wanted to get away from this most depressing spot. "Don't you think," he said courteously, "that perhaps it would be a mistake to get involved in a game? Croquet is really such an awfully long one. And I do feel that we shouldn't lose any time. There's no telling what Iblees may be doing, you know. I'm rather uneasy about it."

"I suppose you are. Perhaps it would be better to go along." But Gerhilde looked longingly at the group beyond them. "There's an awfully nice Russian taxi driver there. One of the ones I told you about. I'd love to have you know him. Well, perhaps it's better not. But wouldn't you just like to come and meet them?"

"Oh, it would take ages," he remonstrated, overcome by an inexplicable shyness. In fact, he shrank from seeing these unfortunate gods and goddesses in the bitter humiliation of their fallen fortunes. Surely they must hate to have outsiders see them, to pay shillings to view their misery. "Don't you think it would be better to get along?" he said.

"Perhaps—but I have to see about Brunhilde's horse and I want to ask Father about the best road to take. Oh, that's good. Here he comes now."

A gaunt and tall old man, leaning on a staff, came slowly toward them. He seemed very weary as he walked.

"Hello, Father," Gerhilde shouted, and he looked up, and saw them and waved his staff with surprising vigor. He had a sweet face with the resignation, the transparency of age.

Haroot and Gerhilde went forward and met him, and she introduced the men, and Wotan took Haroot's hand courteously and said, "I am always delighted to meet a friend of my daughter's. Won't you join us in a little game of croquet? I think, my dear, that Fricka is winning. I have just sent for some lemonade. We find it most refreshing. We—what was I saying? Well, no matter— Is your friend planning to spend some time with us here, Gerhilde? I trust that he is. You would, I think, enjoy the life here, my dear sir—quiet, restful—it lacks the excitement that we once had here—but *ad tempora ad mores*, you know. You know your Latin, I fancy—What was I saying? Well, no matter—ah, there goes our lemonade, shall we join the others?"

"Haroot thinks he'd better not, Father. He wants to get off as quickly as possible, and there are some things I'd like to ask you about roads. Let's have our lemonade on a little table by the edge, just the three of us."

"Very well, that would be pleasant," her father agreed, and Gerhilde called and beckoned to the small servitor who was hurrying along the paths carrying a tray.

The man turned, reluctantly, and came back toward them. He was an odd, gnome-like figure wearing a long leather apron, and the thought came to Haroot that it was Mime, but Gerhilde did not address the man by name. She gave him directions about carrying a table and lemonade to the cliff's edge, beneath a certain tall pine tree, and the servant glowered and growled a surly answer in return. Nevertheless, he scurried about to obey her, and shortly they were sitting beneath the tree on uncomfortable small iron chairs.

The lemonade was tepid and made Haroot think with longing of the frosty glasses of it at home on the terrace at Salt-mere—ice tinkling and the feel of the glass cool against your finger-tips. This was very hard to manage because it was served in long horns, thick to the lips and with an unpleasant taste and odor, and if you laid the horn down on the table all the lemonade ran out. A most unsatisfactory form of drinking-utensil, but traditional there in Valhalla. You could not expect anything else.

Gerhilde had taken off her helmet, and there was a red line where it had pressed against her forehead. She was sprawled back in her chair, and her hair was all over her shoulders. It was no pleasure at all for Haroot to look at her. In fact there was no pleasant place anywhere for Haroot to rest his eyes. It made him want to howl to look at the ruins of the castle, and poor old Wotan was nearly as depressing himself, whereas the view beneath and beyond them was fairly ghastly. They were about five feet from the edge of that cliff which fell sheer to the earth, a drop of immeasurable distance. For a mile down, perhaps, they could see a wall of rocks and stone and reddish mud and the tops of pine trees

clinging to crannies, great trees below them, diminishing in size to what seemed distant tiny ferns. And then the wall was lost in a sea of gray clouds shifting and breaking, and sometimes the sea wore thin. Clouds shredded apart and left a hole through which you looked down into the dizzy vacant drop of empty space. Winds moaned upward from the cloud-sea, and winds sighed in the pine above them and dead brown pine-needles fell into their horns of lemonade.

"A horrible place," Haroot thought, and shivered and then listened to Gerhilde's discussion with her father.

"I thought if we took the old road past Olympus," she was saying, "that we might get to the gates more quickly than if we went to Purgatory and up that way. That's awfully long."

"It is," Wotan admitted, "and I'm not at all sure that Brunhilde's horse could make the hill."

"Nor I," Gerhilde said. "But I'm not sure of the road from Olympus on. It's the old highway and hard to follow."

She was bent over the table now, drawing lines with a pointed stone in the green paint of the top. Haroot thought of what Sally would say if any one drew on the surface of any of her tables!

"I think the road branches off here," she said, "and one goes back to the Egyptians and Zoroastrians and Babylonians—all those gods."

"Don't let's get mixed up with them," Haroot said. "We'd never extricate ourselves."

"I know," she said, "we'll have to avoid those roads, but I don't know whether or not they are well posted. We'll have to get on the right road for the celestial regions and homes of the saints."

"WHEN we once get there, I'm on my home-ground," Haroot said. "Then we won't have any more trouble."

"That's very well," Wotan said, "but it will be difficult to find your way—very. Gerhilde, my dear, I doubt if you can accomplish it without maps. I remember once when I went down to earth I got most dreadfully lost in England, and I wandered around the streets of some heathen city—Bath, I believed it was afterward named—and the place was full of Romans, chariots and soldiers and statues of their gods. Pallas Athene, but they called her Minerva, I believe, was hung with wreaths, and I felt most out of place. And so—What was I saying?—well, no matter—"

"You were saying, sir, that Minerva was all hung with wreaths and you felt out of place," Haroot said.

"Oh, yes, yes, so I was—so I did—well, you should have maps, Gerhilde. Maps are most important."

"But where shall we get maps, sir?" Haroot asked.

Wotan put the tips of his fingers together, and thought a moment. "Now I recall," he said, "there was a man called Archimedes—a maker of maps, I believe—at least a scientist. Go to Olympus, and they will doubtless give you his address—a most able man. But must you go at once? Can't you stay and rest a few days?"

"I'm afraid not," Haroot said. "It's most important."

"Iblees is threatening to set up a new god—one of his sons."

"H'm-m—I wonder if it would be El-Assim or Sot or Teer," Wotan said. "H'm-m—none of the five turned out well, I've heard."

"Turned out well!" Haroot cried. "Why, they're horrible. It would mean the most hideous calamity to the civilization of the earth."

"Yes, I suppose it would," Wotan said. "I suppose it might."

"Might! Why, I am breaking my neck to warn The Highest what Iblees is planning."

"Well, I wouldn't break it entirely." There was a faint hint of a smile in Wotan's eyes. "You may find that The Highest is aware of Iblees' plans already."

"I don't believe it for a minute," Haroot said. "You don't realize how much goes on that isn't known—that never gets as far as The Highest—and then the harm is done and the most fearful things happen. I know. I've heard of them. You ought to read the newspapers to see what goes on that is never brought to notice of the authorities—and all Iblees' deviltry."

"I suppose so, I suppose so," Wotan said sadly. "In such an enormous organization as that of the universe, somebody blunders."

"Somebody is always blundering," Haroot said. "It's inexcusable."

"Yes; I, too, made my mistakes when we were in power," Wotan said. He looked at the broken walls of his castle and sighed, deeply. "Well, life goes on. I wish I could be of more help to you, Gerhilde, my dear. I think that Brunhilde's horse is out in the old tournament-field. We put

him there because of the excellent clover —what was I saying? Well—no matter—"

"We'd better be going, then." Gerhilde yawned and stretched her arms wide. "Good-by, Father." She bent and kissed him.

"Good-by, child, take care now. Bless you." His hand was white and pitifully thin and it trembled, and he laid it on the gold hair of her bent head.

"Good-by, sir," Haroot said. He felt a lump in his throat, and wished that he might have known his own father.

"Good-by, my boy, you are very welcome any time you care to come here."

"Thank you, sir."

They left the old man sitting beneath the pine tree. His hands were clasped on the top of his staff, and tears were in his eyes.

"It seems too bad to leave him alone there," Haroot said; but Gerhilde shrugged her shoulders.

"Why, he's perfectly all right," she said. "He'll go back with the others in a minute and play some more croquet and be as jolly as a cricket. Now, let's get Brunhilde's horse."

CHAPTER IX

THE minute they left Valhalla, Haroot's spirits began to revive. And it was pleasant to be riding a horse himself, not clinging to Gerhilde's waist like a ninny. The steed was old and bony, but it seemed glad to get out and run. It kept trying to run races with Gerhilde's beast and on one long stretch of road, was able to beat it by a length and a half. Haroot felt quite elated.

"This is a good animal," he said. "Whatever did happen to Brunhilde, by the way?"

"Oh, she lost her immortality, you know."

"Yes, I know—but what did finally become of her?"

"Well, she and Siegfried just had to go on the usual round of reincarnations. Eventually they'll win out, but it takes an awfully long time. I'm afraid I've lost track of them, but Father hasn't. He keeps in touch with her and if she's having too bad a time he puts in a good word for her to the authorities. It seems to me that the last I heard about them was that they were living in Los Angeles in this incarnation. Siegfried is a real-estate man, and they have four children—at least I think so. I'm not sure really. We always quarreled when she was home. She would wear my helmets. It's much harder living with a woman than a man, I should think. A man doesn't fuss so. I shouldn't think you would be an awfully hard person to live with."

He snorted. "I'm not. You ought to know what my wife thinks about me. I'm always spilling things and dropping them all over the place."

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Bones?"

"Bones?" He was puzzled. "No, I don't drop bones; why in the world should I?"

"Bones under the table in the floor-rushes."

He laughed. "Rushes are entirely out of fashion, Gerhilde. No, I drop plates and bottles and things."

"And because of that your wife doesn't like you."

"Oh, I never said she didn't like me," he interrupted quickly.

"No, you never said it," she said, "but your eyes—"

"My eyes are quite all right," he said lightly. Gerhilde, at the moment was regarding him with a most soulful expression in her own eyes, and she was riding her horse so near his that his knee was ground between the saddles. She, being side-saddle, was naturally untroubled, but it was far from comfortable for him. Nor was he pleased at the quite obvious meaning of her glances. Giving them the most puritanical interpretation they meant that he, poor misunderstood man, might derive some comfort from holding the hand of a woman who really could appreciate him.

"Er—lovely country, isn't it?" he said. "Charming—I like these broad fields. And the wheat and poppies."

"Never saw much in flowers myself," Gerhilde said, and hit her horse's flank with the flat of her hand. She cantered on, and even her back looked sulky. Haroot was sorry, but he did not want to discuss Sally with Gerhilde, nor did he want to talk about the expression of his own eyes.

The fields about them were beautiful—wide stretches of pale gold wheat dotted with scarlet poppies or strewn with patches of purple clover. And the winds that blew across the fields were heavy with the smell of clover and of sun-warmed grain. The road was white and narrow, winding slightly uphill, and here and there they rode through bits of woods, cool and green

and sweet with scent of fern. Here in woody places were streams, and the horses drank with great sucking draughts, and Gerhilde pushed back her helmet and washed her face with a handful of leaves. She looked very hot, and there was again that line on her forehead where the helmet marked her.

It was utterly unreasonable, Haroot admitted to himself, to be annoyed by that red line. The poor girl couldn't help it. But he kept comparing her with Sally, thinking of Sally in her cool, soft blue silk dresses. Her skin was so beautiful, tanned, and yet with a faint pink tinge, like the children, not at all the beefy color of Gerhilde. But the poor girl certainly could not help her complexion. It was unfortunate that she seemed to be so attracted to him. That types was so susceptible. Another man might take advantage and no one—well, Haroot was not that type of man. Perhaps when he had been in the body of the fig-seller of Cairo. He had taken his responsibilities more lightly then, been out for the fun of life more, and, of course, then he had not had Sally.

It all came down to that, really. Sally. He was taking this trip for her and the children, that civilization might be preserved for them, with pleasant homes and kindly people, with open fires at night, and flowers and children in gardens, with amusing books, and music that fills you with joy and fervor. To make the world safe for civilization. He hoped he might accomplish it.

Even now he felt sometimes a coldness in his spine, expecting to see a shadowy, malignant form rise out of the ground before him and say, "Iblees wants you at once. He says what are you wasting so much time about?" But Iblees' messengers seldom came to these regions. He would not worry about them. When he worried he felt too tired and his head ached.

He doubted if he could reach the throne of The Highest, but he could send a message up by some friendly saint or martyr, and then perhaps he would be allowed to go home and turn his attention toward winning Sally. It would be too cruel if he were never allowed to go home again—to drink iced tea on the terrace in the garden and play with the children among the syringa bushes. It would be too bitterly cruel if he had to go through life dreaming of Sally's arms about his neck, and never have them there; having nothing but the thought of what he had desired with all his soul—and missed. And yet many people win nothing of life but desire and frustration. It was hard. He felt dreadfully discouraged, in that mood where one wants one's mother to turn to.

But Gerhilde, riding gloomily ahead, was far from being a good substitute for a mother. However, she was somebody. They couldn't ride along like this at cross-purposes indefinitely, so he shouted, "Hello, Gerhilde—what's that over on that hillside? I thought I saw some houses."

She reined in her horse and waited for him to catch up with her.

"They are houses," she said. "We're almost there."

Archimedes, they were told by several people, was at a festival on Olympus—games and races and athletic contests. No one could get in without a ticket, but perhaps they could get a message to him. So Haroot and Gerhilde rode on, and the people they questioned turned back to work in their fields.

The roads seemed deserted. In the distance they saw white marble columns and roofs of the houses of a village, but their way led up the side of the mountain, winding along steep rocky fields and scrambling up trails, brown and slippery with pine-needles and flecked with golden bits of sun. Far up they came upon a small, old temple, its columns broken and half its roof fallen in ruins down the steep cliffs below. In its center was a slab of marble, blackened by old sacrificial fires, and a wreath of withered flowers lay in a corner—a long-dead offering to some neglected god.

"We'll let the horses rest here a minute," Gerhilde said gruffly.

SO THEY slipped off, and let the creatures lip bits of weeds and pull the leaves off low branches of an oak tree. Haroot went in the temple and sat on the rail, and looked down to a stream that ran swiftly below the cliffs—a shallow stream, bubbling around rocks, brown and white and gold, with purple shadows. Gerhilde stood by the entrance, and shook her hair down and combed it with her fingers and then braided it. It was beautiful hair, the color of wheat, but she shook and braided it angrily.

"She's gathering her emotions for a storm," Haroot thought, and sighed, wishing that he did not have to be at hand when the storm should break.

"*I* think you're very foolish," she said.

He didn't know quite what to say. If there were any way to appease her, to turn her off—any word to say that would make her think of something entirely different and pleasant!

"Do you know," he said hastily, "I think I've seldom met such a charming old man as your father."

But it didn't work. She grunted and said, "I think you're afraid of me. All right, if you are I'll—"

"But I'm not," he interrupted. "What nonsense, Gerhilde. You women are simply full of the greatest fool number of notions."

She was angry and that remark of his made her more so. She plumped herself down on the marble slab where the sacrificial fires had been, and started to speak. But the sound of footsteps stopped her, and they looked up the path and saw a tall woman in white robes coming towards them. Sunlight glinted on her helmet, but it was not the type of Gerhilde's; it had no wings. And the woman was walking slowly, reading a scroll.

"Idiot not to look where she's going. She'll stub her toe and fall," Gerhilde growled.

"I don't believe so. I think she's Pallas Athene."

"Oh, Minerva, you mean."

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I don't think much of her far-famed wisdom if that's all the sense she has. There—what did I tell you?"

But though Pallas Athene did slip, she did not quite fall. She caught and steadied herself by a tree trunk, and saw Haroot and Gerhilde watching her with noticeable interest.

"Good afternoon," she said, with great dignity. "If you were going to the games this is not the way. The road leads off to the left."

"No, we're not going to the games," Gerhilde said rather rudely, and Haroot hastened to say:

"I should like nothing better than to see them, but unfortunately I haven't time. I am going on a very important mission to The Highest, and we want to find the quickest road there; so we came to see if we could find Archimedes and borrow his maps."

"I doubt if you could see him this afternoon," she said. "He and Socrates and Father are umpiring for the discus-throwing. But you could get a message to him, and perhaps he could send some one back to his home for the maps. May I ask your names?"

"This is Gerhilde," Haroot said. "One of the Valkyries." Pallas Athene bowed politely but vaguely, and it was evident that she had never heard of the Valkyries in her life. Haroot wished that she might have been a little more tactful, for Gerhilde was fairly scowling, but he said:

"And I am Benjamin Bingham."

"Bingham?" Pallas Athene said, and looked most interested. "Aren't there English Binghams?"

"I am an American," Haroot said.

"Really! You're not at all my idea of what an American man looks like," Pallas said. "You're almost Greek, really."

"He's not at all Greek," Gerhilde said. "He's absolutely Teutonic!"

And Haroot, looking at his tunic of circles and birds of paradise that clothed him, thought that he looked like no country on earth or Heaven, and wondered why he had introduced himself as Mr. Benjamin Bingham of America. He had been thinking of Sally and had said the first thing that came to his head.

"If you are an American," Pallas Athene said, and enthusiasm broke through what was obviously her natural reserve and dignity, "you can tell me about something I've been most anxious to have explained! It's the McCormick reaper. You know, I invented the plow—oh, it didn't amount to anything—years ago, but I've always been interested in agricultural implements, and we so seldom see Americans."

"He's no more American than I am," Gerhilde said. "He's one of these spirit-creatures that just happens to be in an American body by mistake. His name is Haroot."

"It certainly was not by mistake." Haroot was indignant. "I chose this body myself, thank you."

"And very poor taste I think you showed," Gerhilde said. "No wonder your wife won't have anything to do with you."

"That's not a subject for discussion." Now Haroot was very angry. "I certainly did not come here to discuss my domestic problems with Pallas Athene."

"Why not?" she said kindly. "Who better?"

"It's very decent of you," he said, and was grateful to her courtesy, "but it's not a matter that I want to discuss with anybody."

"I can quite understand," she said, and looked at Gerhilde reprovingly. "But I will

give you one bit of advice, and that is this: A man sat down under an apple tree and waited for a golden apple to fall into his lap. Finally, when the frost came, it did fall, and he tasted it and it was bitter. 'Well what can you expect?' the apple said. 'You should have climbed for me three weeks ago.'"

"Thank you," Haroot said, somberly. "I suppose you're right."

"Ridiculous," Gerhilde said. "The man was a fool not to go off and take another apple, when there was a much bigger and better one waiting for him on the next tree."

"I don't know anything about the other apples," Pallas said. Her tones were very cold indeed. "But if a man wants a thing very much he can usually get it."

"And if a woman wants a thing very much she can usually get it," Gerhilde said.

"No; that does not follow at all."

A HEAVY silence came upon him. Gerhilde sat—hunched awkwardly, her elbows resting on her knees, her chin in her hands, her thick braids falling over her shoulders to the floor. Haroot, in his bright tunic, sat on the rail of the temple and flipped broken bits of stone toward the river far below. And Pallas Athene stood in the temple entrance, leaning against a broken pillar. Above them a small red squirrel chattered in a tree and dropped acorn-shells onto the stained old marble floor. A tension ominous and lurking was almost as tangible as some evil odor, and though the sun still shone and glinted on high pine-needles and silvered strands of cob-webs in the air, still there seemed a darkness. A thick cloud spread from the fires of Gerhilde's discontent.

"Well," Pallas said, "I suppose that you must be in a hurry for the maps. I'll go up and ask Archimedes for them. He can send them to you by some slave."

"I'm dreadfully sorry," Haroot said. He felt that he was apologizing for many things and that Pallas understood what was not spoken.

"It's quite all right," she said. "Wait here till the slave comes."

"Thank you," he said; but Gerhilde only grunted as Pallas Athene, with polite farewells, was gone.

"If I don't master this situation quickly it will run away with me," Haroot thought, and he turned and fairly glared at Gerhilde.

"What did you mean by behaving like that?" he said as sternly as was possible for him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. It's inexcusably bourgeois to indulge in personalities and to discuss a person's domestic difficulties with a casual stranger." He thought that Gerhilde was the kind of person who might be awed by serious-sounding words, and he was right. Her lower lip began to stick out and tremble and her eyes looked watery and alarmed. "I thought you had at least a vestige of self-control and the rudiments, at least, of good breeding, but I assure you, Gerhilde, I should never have undertaken this journey with you if I had anticipated any such infantile behavior or such discourtesy and rudeness and unrestraint. I should think—"

"Oh, don't!" she cried. "Don't, don't, Haroot." She buried her head on her arms, and sobbed and shook wildly.

"What was it all about anyway?" he said. "Stop that noise and tell me what made you act so."

She looked up, her face dripping with tears and her eyes red and swollen. "I loved you so." She sobbed and wiped her face with her sleeve, and Haroot frowned at her.

"That's nonsense. You haven't any business to love me. I'm married."

"I'm terribly sorry," she said. "I see now that it is something that nobody does in America, but I couldn't help it, Haroot. And all I wanted was for you to love me a little. And you've been so cold to me. I don't think you like me at all—not the slightest."

"But I do," he said. "I like you very much. I like you as a—"

"Don't say as a pal," she cried. "I couldn't stand having you say that."

"I shouldn't think of saying it. It's an expression I never use. But I do like you as a friend, Gerhilde."

She moaned as if he had struck her. "But that's the trouble," she said. "I can't be a friend to a man. Women like me can't, Haroot. It's not what women are made for. I'm not little enough to be just a friend."

"It's not a question of littleness."

"Well, I don't know what it's a question of. All I know is that when I love a man I want him to love me and I want to talk about quite different things than what a nice old man my father is, and flowers, and McCormick reapers. I'm not one of these women who all the time want to be

talking about roots and bulbs and fertilizers. I think that's the only kind of woman you really like, Haroot."

She sniffed and wiped her face on her sleeve again, and Haroot wondered if perhaps she were not right. He did like women who were fond of their gardens. He loved to think of Sally, in a white dress, kneeling in a border of blue delphinium —the charming line of her shoulders and bowed head.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But of course it's not your fault if you don't care for gardens."

"I should say not." She was indignant. "And then along came that Pallas Athene, and you thought her so wonderful."

"I didn't. I merely thought her a pleasant, intelligent and dignified woman. I'm sorry that I didn't have an opportunity to discuss the McCormick reaper with her. Now don't get all excited again, Gerhilde. I have not time to waste on your hysterics."

"I won't go a step farther with you," she cried, and leaped to her feet. "It puts me in much too compromising a position. A young woman, traveling with a man, like this. I think you're a perfect beast to suggest it, Haroot. You can go on yourself and I'll go home this minute. You needn't try to urge me to stay, either. I'm sure my father wouldn't want it."

"Oh, I say," Haroot began feebly, but he hoped with all his heart that she wouldn't change her mind again. "That seems a shame, but if you feel you must, I mean if you think your father would rather—what about Brunhilde's horse?"

"Just let him loose when you get back to Dr. Peterson's and he'll find his way back."

"Is that safe?" Haroot said. "It sounds rather risky."

"No, it's perfectly safe," she said. She was climbing on her horse, and she looked like a large, unhappy child.

"I say, I can't bear to have you go away like this," Haroot said. "It does make me feel awfully. It would have been nice if I could have loved you, Gerhilde. I think you're a very fine person, truly."

"Do you, Haroot?" Her face lighted a little, although she seemed very pale and subdued. "I could have made you happy, I think. I really think I'm a better type for you than your wife is."

"I don't know, perhaps you would be," he said. "But it just isn't possible, Gerhilde. But I'm a thousand times obliged to you. Kiss me good-by, dear Gerhilde."

He reached his arms up and she bent down to kiss him. It was a very soft and warm kiss, and very damp indeed.

She sobbed and said, "Good-by," and he watched her riding down the steep path of the hill.

"That's over," he thought with relief. "And there comes the slave with the maps."

IT WAS not as long a journey as he had anticipated to the celestial regions. Fortunately, by the aid of maps, he was able to avoid entirely those settlements of Egyptians and Zoroastrians and Babylonians where he had feared he might become involved and lose his way. And then he found a straight highway, clearly marked and very lovely. And the nearer he came to the hills that he was seeking the happier he felt. This was his own country, and each small blue flower in the grass beside the road seemed to shout to him a call of greeting. The fields seemed washed with waves of sun and wind. And soon he passed through orchards, dark green trees bright with the red-gold of oranges and the clear green-gold of lemons, and trees gay with scarlet apples. And in the distance were saints in vivid robes and thin gold halos, working and walking among the trees.

The road ahead of Haroot wound to a far hillside, and there he saw gold turrets and spires of a town that he knew well. He urged his horse faster on, and thought that he would go to some friend's house—to Saint Cecelia's. She and Valerian could advise him wisely how to approach The Highest. Perhaps they could suggest a way for him to get there himself, although that was a thought that was rather alarming. To go alone before that throne! No, Haroot would rather not. The very idea was overwhelming. The light would be too bright.

Everything was as it had been, as he had thought of it and dreamed and remembered a thousand times. Often he had feared that it would change—as cities on the earth change; that the trees would be cut, the gardens wasted and destroyed, the wide streets filled with crowded, ugly houses. But it was not so. He had found again the past as he had loved it. There were even the same two plants of tall white roses growing in blue jars on either side of Saint Cecelia's door.

He knocked and an attendant opened

the door, and smiled at him in greeting; the same small attendant, a page in jacket and hose of rust-color and tan. He said that his mistress was at home—out in the garden, with the master and a guest, he thought. He would take care of Haroot's horse, and Haroot might go to the garden, if he remembered the way.

There was in the rooms a coolness and a breath of flowers that reminded Haroot of Sally's house. There was the organ with its dull gold pipes glowing against the oak of wainscotting. And beyond this room, arched windows opened to the garden, to the sunlight, to the smell of heliotrope and roses and mignonette. And Saint Jerome's old lion lay and dozed against the sunny wall. And there were oranges and lemons —burnished balls in dark trees beyond the cloister arches—and small gay flowers were sprinkled in the grass.

Three people sat about a table, talking. They turned as he approached them, and they knew him and they all cried out in delight. They were glad to see him. In fact, they were overjoyed to see him, and their friendship and warmth made Haroot nearly weep. He had to bend down and rub the head of St. Jerome's old lion and say, huskily:

"You still here, old fellow?" Pretty good to find you here too."

"He follows me everywhere," Jerome said. "I'm afraid he's dug a great hole in Cecelia's border, but he always *will* sleep against a sunny wall."

"It doesn't matter in the least," she said, and smiled. And Haroot smiled, for he had heard them say the very words times without number, and he thought of what Sally's reaction would have been had the Blake dog slept among her delphinium and snapdragon. Sally had not learned Cecelia's acceptance and resignation, nor would he have loved her with such ardor if she had.

"Get another chair for Haroot, Valerian," Cecelia told her husband. "How well you're looking, not so emaciated as you used to be. Of course I miss the wings, but perhaps you're better without them, really. They must have seemed clumsy, often. Sit here, out of the glare, and tell us everything."

"Yes, we want to know the whole story of your life, lad." Valerian was always so cordial and interested. And Jerome, too, acted as if Haroot were a long-lost son. It was tremendously gratifying that they had not burst into exclamations of horror or derision at his personal appearance. Not that they would have been so discourteous under any circumstances, and they had the gift of seeing the best in people. But the fact that they accepted him as he had been, made Haroot feel that perhaps his own personality was beginning to dominate the body of Benjy at last. The mere thought made him feel elated. And it was immeasurable relief to know that his story would be believed and understood, and that he would not, as he related it, be considered mad.

THIS time, it was rather fun to tell of his adventures. Not all, naturally, for there were parts of his experiences as the fig-seller that did not seem appropriate for Cecelia's garden. He touched lightly on that Cairo existence; nor did he go into his life very deeply when he had been hanging by his heels in hell. But he did enlarge upon the details of Salt-mere, because he felt that Cecelia was really interested. He told about the children and Sally, and her music and flowers; and Cecelia fairly glowed with enthusiastic sympathy and said that she would love to know her, and Valerian and Jerome nodded their heads and said it was a pity that Haroot could not have brought her too. At that moment he was more than glad that Gerhilde had gone home. It would have looked very odd, certainly, had she accompanied him, and he had never thought of its unconventionality at all.

"No," he said, "it was impossible for Sally to come. You see, she still is very much of a mortal. And I had this special mission. It is absolutely imperative for me to get a message to The Highest. I don't know whether to try myself or to get a note up through somebody else."

"It would be hard for you to get there yourself, I'm afraid," Valerian said. "You see, having no official position now, it would be difficult to manage it. You should, technically, if you had wanted to report anything to The Highest, have sent up a message by your guardian angel."

"But I never thought of it," Haroot said. "To tell the truth I didn't know I had one."

"Yes; you are classed as a mortal, now," Valerian said.

"You may have had one of the young ones," Jerome said. "I regret that many of them are very inattentive to their business."

"That never occurred to me," Haroot said. "And it is such a vital matter."

"I'll take a note up for you with pleasure," Valerian said. "Can you tell us about it?"

"Surely; I'd like to. It's inconceivably horrible." Haroot was beginning to feel distressed and tense again. But although he told them the whole tale of Iblees' conversations and obvious intentions, although he went into it all carefully and in detail, the three others did not seem at all riven by dread or terror. They listened with all attention, but he might have been telling them of the difficulty of fruit growing in America. They were not shaken to the bottom of their souls, with fear.

"But you don't seem to take it seriously, as I do," he cried; and Valerian said:

"Well, I don't know, my dear fellow. I can't help feeling that everything will be all right." And Jerome said:

"I've learned one thing about us reformers, my boy. Nobody takes us as hard as we take ourselves."

But they would be glad to carry this message. And the small attendant brought ink and a parchment and sand, to blot it; and Haroot wrote quickly, his hand shaking with nervousness; and Valerian would not let him copy what he had written, for they said it was getting late.

They left him alone in the garden with Cecelia, and he sighed and stretched his arms.

"You hold beauty here, don't you?" he said, and she answered:

"It's eternal—beauty and flowers and music and friendship."

"I was afraid you might have forgotten me," he said. "I've changed so."

"But I don't think that you have changed so tremendously, Haroot," she said. "Of course that garment you are wearing is a bit odd—I mean it's very attractive, but the design is somewhat startling and unusual; don't you think it is?"

He regarded it ruefully, drawing in his chin the better to view his chest. "It's modern," he said, "all those circles and birds of paradise, completely unrestrained. They haven't much restraint on earth in these days. That's what worries me so, Cecelia. You've no idea of what it's like now—the drinking—the lack of moral fiber and the attitude that, 'oh, well, we have only one life to lead and we're going to get as much fun out of it as we can.' "

"I know," she said. "It was the same way in my days in Rome, Haroot. When they get to that point, a new religion usually crops up. Out of weakness comes strength."

"That's all very well," he said. Her complacency troubled him. "That was all very well in your case because it was a good religion that came up, but it's quite different now, Cecelia. This is an evil religion. You have no conception of the extent of its evil. You've never seen any of its rites or ceremonials—sacrifices—human ones, I mean, and orgies. And an absolute sweeping away of law and order.

"They'll rush in in crowds, I tell you, and destroy the buildings—burn them to see the flames and blow them up in fragments; and New York will be a heap of ruins and all the pictures will be destroyed and the books will be ruined and science and knowledge will be lost and there'll be no clothes, no food, no safety—just ragged bands of creatures looting and killing—fallen houses, gardens filled with burdock and blackened brick and timbers—and the children—you can't bear that thought—"

"Oh, Haroot, it can't really be as bad as that," she said. "And anyway, in places where there is time, all horror passes so quickly, and either the people go on to something better, or something better comes."

"I'm not so sure," he said. "Sometimes it seems all horror there. Do you think your husband will get back soon? Do you think he can possibly get to The Highest? I think perhaps I didn't make myself clear enough in that note. I should have copied it again. I write very badly, and I blotted my name a little, I'm afraid. I think I should have tried to get there myself. You see, I've wasted quite a lot of time already and there's no telling what Iblees may be doing on earth. It may be all destroyed already, and he may be wreaking his vengeance on my wife and children because I've turned against him and come up here."

HE WAS so nervous that he was walking up and down the paths of the garden, and Cecelia sat and looked at him, with sympathy, but not much understanding. She was very charming in her long, pale rose-colored gown with its golden stenciled borders and her gold halo, and with her crown of roses and little pile of musical instruments about her feet. But he could not seem to arouse her to a sense of the desperateness of the situation.

"Of course I suppose he knows that I've come up here," he said. "I wonder now that I was such a fool as to think I had security at all. And I'm half crazy about my family."

"I shouldn't be," she said. "I rather imagine that they are being taken care of, since you came here for such a purpose."

"You mean it's all a waste of time and energy and that the whole plot is known anyway?" He stopped in front of her, and she bent to pick a small gold flower from the grass.

"No, I can't say that," she said. "Because sometimes things are not known. But as a general rule they are, and everything comes out happily in the end."

"But that's what you keep saying and that's what I'm not sure of!"

"Poor Haroot, you never used to be so troubled by doubts."

"No, but I've never lived so long on earth before. You can't imagine how modern life shakes your faith in everything."

"But that is very wrong," she said. "And you must not be so nervous, Haroot. Jerome and Valerian will be back soon, I'm sure. You sit down and I'll go in and play for you. Just sit in the sun and relax."

She went into the house, and the music of her organ came to him and soothed him. She did play beautifully, gorgeous chants and anthems, soft as water running over a stony brook bed, serene as sunlight slanting through old stained glass windows; and then crescendos lifting the spirit toward the crashing glory of a triumphant paean.

There was the table in front of him, and he leaned his arms on it and buried his head in his arms. The sun was warm on the back of his neck, and there came that pleasant smell of fruit and flowers. And something soft rubbed by his leg and he put his hand down and felt the fur of the old lion, like a great dog, who had come to comfort him by the nearness of a friendly presence.

It snorted and turned around and then slowly lay down beside him, and the music and the wind washed over him, washed fear away. Peace came to him. It was as if he saw the throne, and the gold, and the great light, and all the crowd of glorious celestial beings raising long golden trumpets— He may have slept.

A voice said, "It's quite all right now, Haroot," and he sat up. A soft light like a veil of lavender was in the garden, and the distant hills were silvery with a mist of sunset. And there was Cecelia's husband, Valerian, and a tall young man with wings and a bright blue robe. "This is Michael," Valerian said, and Haroot rose and bowed. Never before had he met the archangel.

"I'm sorry to have bothered any one," Haroot said. "But it seemed to me that such an important plot should be reported."

"Oh, you were quite right," the archangel said, and smiled.

"And will it be stopped—I mean—will it be all right?"

"It will be all right, certainly."

"Sit down, do sit down," Valerian said; and Cecelia came out from the cloisters.

"But it would be quite impossible to tell by what means the end will be reached," Michael said. "You understand me, don't you? I mean that sometimes everything has to be jumbled up into the most frightful apparent chaos in order to clear the ground for something better."

"That's exactly what I said." Cecelia was sitting by her husband, holding his hand. "It's always darkest just before dawn, you know, Haroot."

"It is, of course." He remembered the choking blackness in his pit in the mountains of Kaf, before the sun rose in the mornings, and his despair then. "I suppose that all this trip has been absolutely useless?"

"Not a bit of it, my dear fellow," Michael insisted. "If some of you don't have fears and doubts, the rest of you would be no better than crabs and oysters. But, you see, the point is that one person, or one race even, can't possibly see the universe in perspective. Think of the millions of years, the thousands of so-called religions, and through them all the things that last, that are eternal."

"Beauty and love, do you mean?" Haroot said, "and things of that sort?"

"Exactly."

"But cruelty and evil last too."

"Quite—you have to combat them."

"And that's just what you have done, Haroot," Cecelia said with excitement. "I think it was splendid of you to come here."

"THERE'S just one question I have to ask you, Haroot," Michael said, "and you must answer it quite truthfully."

"I will." But he felt frightened. He felt as if he were standing before that Throne and as if the Voice itself spoke to him. He rose and said, "What is the question, Michael?"

"To save civilization would you sacrifice the love of your wife?"

"You mean my love for her?" he asked, and he felt his heart beginning to beat thickly.

"No; her love for you."

"But I've never had it. I've never had even the least little bit of it." He did not realize the desolation in his voice until he saw Cecelia looking at him with pity. "That's what I've been longing and hoping for," he said. "All this time I've been living for the day when I could go back to Sally and try to get her to love me. I think perhaps I could do it if I had time and were not always worried about this matter. I've been under a dreadful strain."

"I'm sure you have," Michael said, kindly. "But I will have to ask you to answer this question, Haroot. Would you give up her possible love for you, for the sake of civilization?"

So it was a choice, a sacrifice, and after all he was not to know happiness at last. So Abraham had been called upon to lay Isaac on the altar, though the ram had saved him. By sacrifice you bought security; or was it just perhaps a test, a dark and cruel path through which you passed to peace and glory? Would he give up? For a decent soul there was but one answer.

"Oh, yes, of course I'd give it up," he said; and mingled with the ache, he felt elation, and Michael smiled at him and rose and took his hand.

"You can go back now," he said. "And I shouldn't worry too much. Life goes on, you know."

"I suppose it does," Haroot said, and looked about him wistfully. "But I couldn't bear to have these charming places go to ruin and decay, like Valhalla, and all those palaces of the old gods."

But even at that thought the others looked so completely untroubled that he felt ashamed of his fears.

"Don't worry so, Haroot," Valerian said. "Remember, my dear fellow, that you're not Atlas." And they all laughed, and the lion yawned.

Then they said good-by, and an attendant brought around his horse. It was dusk when he rode out of the courtyard and waved to them, and they stood in a group in the arched doorway and waved back.

Then lights began to prick the darkness, and he thought of the days when he had lighted them, and then he thought of Sally, sitting before an open fire in the living-room at Salt-mere, reading, perhaps the *Wonder Book*, to the children.

He kicked his horse with his heels, and they rode wildly through the darkness. His hair blew back, lights fled behind him; he did not know if his horse were galloping over road or clouds. They sped through space till the wind in his ears deafened him, and his eyes burned until he closed them tight.

Something grated against his leg, and his horse had stopped. They were at the balcony outside of his window at Dr. Peterson's. In a moment he had climbed over, and the horse was gone, and he was in his room. It was six o'clock, time for him to dress for dinner, but time first to be able to get a bath. As he was hurrying down the corridor in pajamas and bathrobe, the small red-haired nurse approached him.

"I've got some news for you I bet you'll hate, Mr. Bingham," she said coyly. "Your wife's coming in on the seven-fifteen tonight."

CHAPTER X

CURIOUS what a lightness he felt, a release from bondage. And the old dread of Iblees, the feeling that his spirit was held in chains, was gone. He felt as if he had been bathing in a cold and salty sea, as if fresh, keen winds had blown through his soul and swept it clear of all the shadows of darkness. Even that question of the sacrifice of Sally's love seemed now of unimportance. After all, it may have been merely a rhetorical question, a matter of form, perhaps. And Sally was coming and the burden of the world was off his shoulders. Moreover, as he tied his black tie and looked at himself in the mirror, he realized that within the last few weeks his appearance had improved tremendously. He was surely thinner and had a splendid coat of tan.

He must hurry to be down in the hall to greet Sally. Could he kiss her when she came in? Other husbands did when their wives came to see them. Why couldn't he? But then, Sally was not demonstrative. Perhaps it would be taking an unfair advantage of her to kiss her in the hall, with other people about and watching with interest. No, he would wait until she was ready. He would not be like Soames in *The Forsyte Saga*. Poor Soames. How tragic it would be to die and never to have succeeded in bringing Sally to the point of softening. Perhaps he could not even manage to be her friend. Life was like that, full of the necessity of enduring things too dreadful to endure. The dinner-gong was ringing and he must hurry down. She would be there in no time.

And she was—coming in the doorway as he stepped out of the elevator, the bell-boy carrying her bag before her to the desk.

"Oh, Sally!" Haroot said, and he did kiss her. How could he help it? After all that he had been through it was as though his heart shouted with joy to see her. She was so lovely, her face cool and tinged with the wind, her clothes so charmingly right, her eyes and mouth so alluring with their honest sweetness. If they had only been not quite so kindly impersonal. If she had not turned her cheek so far as he had kissed her. Still, it was something that she was not really annoyed at his having done it, something to be glad of that she smiled at him and said:

"Well, Benjy, you *are* looking better."

He was so glad to see her that he felt as if he must do something extravagant for her—carry her trunks upstairs, or, at least, her dinner. That would be nice, to have dinner in her room together—just the two of them at a little table with flowers, and course after course of delicious food brought up by some quiet maid. But the food here was never delicious, and when it came up on trays it was almost inedible, with the gravy cold and unpleasant; and anyway Sally wouldn't want to eat alone in the room with him. He felt that she didn't want to be alone with him at all. There was an awkwardness hard to hide.

"How are the children?" he asked quickly, to cover it. "I got Alice-Anne's letter and I thought it was great. She does that new printing awfully well, doesn't she? I wonder if they can really write it as fast as writing."

"They say so," she said. They were at the moment going up in the elevator. "They think the children do it almost as fast. Of course, it may make a little difference with their college-entrance examinations."

"Oh, college," he said. "Well, I'm not at all sure that I want Alice-Anne to go to college; are you? I think perhaps a girl loses a little charm if she goes to college."

"That's ridiculously old-fashioned, Benjy." Sally was indignant, and the bell-boy was fumbling to open her door with one hand while he clung to her bag with the other.

"I'm sure the boys should go," he said. "And I'd like them to play baseball well—be ripping good at it. There's nothing like it, really."

The bell-boy had been tipped and had left, and Sally was taking off her hat and was about to wash. It was ridiculous to go on talking about the children and college like this, clinging to that thin rope of conversation as if they would drown if they let go. Perhaps they would drown. At least they would flounder in a sea of emotion.

It was Haroot's fault. He should not have kissed her. It had alarmed her. And she was not ready yet to face a crisis. But it must come, inevitably, and the question was, should he let it develop naturally or force it quickly? There was that parable of Pallas Athene's about the golden apple. He must not wait for the frost. And yet if he hurried, he might lose everything. He had had a plan in the back of his mind for some time, a way in which they might bridge some of her antagonism towards him.

When she was out of doors, free of all the small details of the life at Salt-mere she was always more approachable, more friendly. She seemed to like him better, out of doors. Perhaps they could go away for a week or two together and camp up in the mountains. There they might find some satisfactory basis upon which to build their future. If not love, at least friendship. Some people lived together as friends, although he didn't know—

"I think perhaps it would be wiser to send the boys to different colleges," he said. "Sometimes there's jealousy, hidden repressions, you know, and all that sort of thing. Awfully bad for kids. Although they're so different, there may not be that danger. Timmy's so good at machinery."

"Yes; and Robin has quite a flair for painting, I think," Sally said. "You should see the pictures he drew of a mountain sheep, Benjy. It was really remarkable—lots of action. Well, shall we go down?"

DR. PETERSON thought that the plan of two weeks' camping in the mountains would be excellent. He knew of just the place. A friend of his would be glad to rent a comfortable, small house on a lake's edge. The nights would be chilly, but the foliage would be gorgeous now, and there might be some fishing. The house was well equipped with blankets, and they would be near enough to a farmhouse to walk there for lunch and dinner, if they wanted.

It was a delightful place, really. He could see that Mrs. Bingham did not care for camping, but for her husband's sake—it was just exactly the thing he needed to complete his rest cure. He was tremendously improved, as she could see; the look of strain had quite gone from his

eyes, and he was fifty percent better in every way. You can't have a mast hit you on the head and not feel it a little, and Mr. Bingham had made a remarkable recovery.

It was all in the hands of his wife now. All in her hands.

Dr. Peterson backed Haroot up well on the question of the camping, and not only did he back him up, but before the Bingham's left his office he telegraphed the friend who owned the cottage and made all arrangements necessary, except, of course, the getting of Sally's clothes.

At first they seemed to present an insurmountable difficulty. She would have to have her gray tweed suit and green leather jacket and crape-soled shoes and woolen socks. And it would take her so long to go back and get them, and none of the maids could pack and send them properly, and her gray-and-green sweater was in one of the sewing-room drawers and Sally couldn't quite remember whether it was the second or third from the bottom on the right-hand side.

But she finally consented to send a long night-letter of instructions to Petra, and the clothes were to be sent to the camp, and the place was to be opened and cleaned for them by the near-by farmer. Farewells were said to Dr. Peterson and the nurses and attendants and the old man who talked politics with them in the evening, and lavish tips were distributed; and so they drove off—with the red-haired nurse waving indiscreetly from a window of the upper hall.

Haroot had had one or two rather trying moments during the last few days with that nurse. She had seemed to haunt the more shadowy corners of corridors and had quite insisted that he come to the nurses' masquerade on Friday night in spite of Sally's being there. She said that she had made the costume of the Roman slave just because he was going as the conqueror, and it was mean of him to have made her go to all that trouble when she already had a perfectly *lovely* costume of a wild-rose blossom, and she looked just sweet in it, although she did say it as shouldn't. And why couldn't Mr. Bingham just slip out of his room at twelve o'clock, say, and come over to the nurses' hall? He did look perfectly regal in his emperor's costume, and she'd bought an inch-wide gold ribbon to go around his head. She thought that gold ribbons made a man have such a noble-looking brow.

It had been with the greatest difficulty that he had kept his noble brow from the noose of the gold and inch-wide ribbon. He had had to be quite ruthless. But he had succeeded—and Dr. Peterson's was becoming merely a distant stucco house upon a hillside, and the camp was only six hours away.

THE lake, the next morning, was like the bottom of a bright bowl filled with sunshine. Gold and red and green of foliage merged and melted together down high hillsides, to the edges of the lake, all silvery and blue and still. Haroot and Sally sat in their canoe, and drifted. They were glad of sun, warm on their backs, for the air was keen, delicious with the smell of mountains and of wood-smoke. It was very quiet. Somewhere across the fields a cow-bell jangled faintly, the soft voice of ripples broke against the canoe-side, and now and then crows, hurrying, called overhead.

"It's perfect," Sally said, and looked back and smiled at Haroot. Her clothes had come and she was wearing a dark green knitted suit, the color of pine-needles. She had tossed her hat in the bottom of the canoe and her hair was rumpled a little, the way Haroot loved to see it. He wanted to run his fingers through it. It was the color of sunlight on water, and he had never realized before how lovely it was.

"Great, isn't it?" he said. "I like the way the house fits right among the rocks."

"I love the red roof," she said, "against those pine trees and the lovely yellow maples."

It was a small gray shingled house with bright red roof. From farther out on the lake you could not distinguish it from rocks and vivid leaves, but Haroot and Sally were still near enough to see the smoke coiling slowly from the chimney, the steps leading down the rock to the sandy beach, where they could draw up the canoe. It was a most comfortable camp, with living room, a bath and two good bedrooms.

Haroot's room was built out on a low cliff that dropped straight to the water. He had slept with the sound of ripples in his mind all night. And in the morning he had wakened to a delicious smell of coffee and of bacon frying, and had poked his head out of the door to find Sally dressed and getting breakfast, efficiently, on a small

alcohol stove, augmented by the aid of the open fire. So he had dressed quickly and joined her, and as they ate he realized, to his delight, that she had made up her mind to accept him as a friend.

Now they were paddling out to explore the lake a little, and they would end at the farmer's house across a bay and down the nearest point, for lunch.

"Let's go up that cove there," Haroot said, and dipped his paddle in the water. The smooth wood felt very pleasant in his hands. "Funny, isn't it," he said, "the feeling of things? I like any well-planed wood things. Do you?"

"Yes," she said, absent-mindedly. "The wooden salad forks and knives they use in France."

"And kids' blocks and their Noah's Ark animals."

"It's odd," she said. "Timmy and Robin simply adore that old set and they hate the new composition ones so, and they won't have a thing to do with celluloid animals."

"Oh, celluloid animals aren't honest," he said; "there's no weight to them—like some people you know, just paint and shell, and they'd crunch if you squashed them." She laughed a little. He felt as elated and excited as if an audience had applauded him with wild acclaim. It was almost the first time, he thought, that she had ever been amused at any remark he had made to her. They were coming on. He felt a desire to cheer. But her next words dashed him. He had thought ever since shortly after breakfast that she had something on her mind.

"I see you had that stuff I put in your trunk for a laundry bag made up to a costume," she said. What was it for, a dance or something?"

"Where did you find it?" he said. He had a frightened feeling of helpless indecision. How should he answer her? Evade her, refuse to answer, tell her the truth about the trip with Gerhilde and his visit to the house of Cecelia? She had asked him flatly, and how could he lie to her? Yet, if he told her, what would happen? She would be alarmed and convinced that he was in a worse state than he had been. She would pack their trunks and turn back to Dr. Peterson's. This place with its beauty and its hint of happiness would be barred to him forever. His chance would be gone and he would be lost.

"I came across it in your trunk," she said. "I'd made your bed and thought that piece of material would be a good cover, so I looked for it."

"Very effective, isn't it?" he said, and swallowed. He would have to tell her. If she wouldn't accept him as he was, there was no use of trying. Why try to build a house on false sands? "Well, I'll tell you," he said. "I suppose it'll sound absolutely crazy to you—but there was a girl—a girl—" Should he describe that ride through the clouds and tell of the ruined walls of Valhalla, and would he dare tell of Gerhilde's infatuation and the scene in the temple with Pallas Athene? And Cecelia, and the celestial gardens?

"What girl was that?" she said; and her voice was cool and the curve of her back at the bow of the canoe was stiffened for disapproval.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said. Sunlight seemed to have gone from the lake, and he gripped his paddle hard and dug it into the water. The canoe shot ahead, unsteadily. "There was a girl there, one of the nurses. She was rather a fool about me. I had to step on her quite hard. There was going to be a nurses' masquerade and I thought it might be rather fun to go, so I tacked that thing together and that nurse saw it and said she'd go as a Roman slave and I could go as a Roman conqueror, and that made me rather sick—and you came, so I didn't go. But she was sore as anything."

He was aghast at himself. Why had he told that tale? He had meant, he had had every intention of blurting out the whole story of Gerhilde and Pallas and Cecelia, and when he had started it was as if a barrier had come down between his brain and the roads to his speech. Clearly, he saw the picture of that ride with Gerhilde, the gold turrets of the celestial city, but he could not draw those pictures by the means of words. He was almost frightened and he said, huskily, "I didn't mean to tell you—I meant—but I swear, I did have to step on that girl. She was the little one who waved when we went away. But I never gave her the slightest reason. Honestly, Sally, I did step on that young fool female."

To his surprise she laughed, as if relieved, and amused, too. "I believe you, Benjy," she said. "You were a regular Civic Virtue, simply treading on that young woman, like the statue in City Hall Park."

"That's just what I was," he said. "She was coiling herself all over the place. But I was very noble. In fact, she herself said

I was. She bought me a gold ribbon to wear about my noble brow, but I didn't accept it. I say, Sally, she's the celluloid kind of person—pretty and painted but would squash with a crackle."

She laughed again and put her paddle in the water, and for awhile they paddled together, getting the stroke well, and the canoe slid swiftly. They were going up a long cove, and wooded points of land stretched out behind them and they rode through water that was blue and gold and green with the reflection of bright flaming trees.

FOR awhile Sally was silent. Then a bird cried suddenly over on the hills, and Sally said:

"I didn't think much of Dr. Peterson, Benjy. I was rather sorry we'd chosen that place."

"Oh, he wasn't so bad, when you discovered the way his mind worked."

"Well, I don't care for that kind of mind," she said.

It was difficult, talking to her back, but perhaps it was better. She seemed to be approaching a bad place in the conversation. "Of course, I knew perfectly what he was driving at when he talked to me," she said, "and it's something that has to be faced."

"I'm afraid so," Haroot admitted. She was honest, he thought, and brave. She turned sideways on her seat and looked back at him.

"Well, I've faced it," she said, "and I'm willing to be friends, Benjy. That's a good deal now. There's no reason why it shouldn't make for a very pleasant life together for us all. You're very much stronger and better. Dr. Peterson says you've improved fifty percent physically, and he says you have quite a remarkable grasp of political subjects."

He chuckled, but his throat burned with disappointment at her words. "Oh, yes, I had planned to do quite a lot with politics when we got back to Salt-mere."

"Good!" she said. "I've always wanted you to. Why not? I think it would be perfectly splendid. Mr. Blake can get you in."

"Soap bubbles," he said.

"Soap bubbles?"

"Dreams—look things in the face, Sally."

She flushed, even beneath her sunburn, and said, "It is because I am looking things in the face, Benjy, that we can talk it out."

"Yes, I appreciate that," he said, "and I think it's very decent of you to do it of your own volition and not wait to be dragged into the subject by the hair of your head like a Sabine woman."

She flushed again, and he said, "I'm sorry, but I can't go back to Salt-mere, Sally. If that's as far as it can go—well, I don't think either of us is small enough for just friendship." And there came to him the memory of Gerhilde's remark that she was not little enough to be his friend, and his indignant refutation then, that it was not a matter of size.

The canoe drifted slowly and beneath them the water was still and clear. Haroot could see brown, shadowy bottom and the streak of a fish slipping between deep rocks. They were near enough to the shore to smell sweet wet fern and some pungent fungus. A breeze sprang up and two yellow leaves floated down into the canoe.

"It would not be fair to the children, Benjy," she said, "for you to leave them just when you're beginning to mean so much to them."

"And they mean a great deal to me." He thought of them tumbling over him on the grass in the garden, shouting and laughing, capturing the dragon. He had felt for weeks that that was a pleasant joy, too sweet to be regained. He had glimpsed it for a minute, but it was gone and that was the end.

"I should think you would be willing to make some concessions for their sake," she said.

"If I did not love you so much, I could," he answered.

"It's not a question of love at all." She was almost angry, and he smiled and answered:

"It is entirely a question of love. And let me tell you, Sally, I think that you really love me, almost. Only you're fighting it tooth and nail, you're that stubborn. You've walled yourself up in dread terror of any emotion. You've drawn up the portcullis and the drawbridge, and every time you see even the flick of the banner of emotion you give a whoop of defiance and chuck down barrowfuls of boiling oil and lead on its head. That's true now, isn't it? Be honest."

She laughed. "There's something in it," she admitted. "But you're wrong about my loving you. I never could again, Benjy. You know that as well as I."

"But that's all in the past. You won't accept it, will you? You women never will let the dead past bury the dead. You're as bad as puppies fighting over bones—

they won't ever let go of them. You've got this picture of me as a beast and you won't ever take it off the wall of your mind. I'm not a beast. I'm an entirely different person. There's a new picture of me, much better. Just look at me, Sally. You must admit that I'm ever so much handsomer than I used to be. Do admit it, won't you? Come on now. Be nice!"

"You are improved, Benjy, but you're fearfully conceited." Still she smiled as she said it, so there was no sting.

"I know I'm conceited. That's always been a bad fault of mine. It's got me into no end of hot water. But you have to look at things honestly, and I know that I am better-looking. And now that you've made up your mind to be friends it's a thousand times pleasanter, because our minds do enjoy each other. I had a hunch that they would from the minute I saw you, Sally.

She said, "I've had enough of this conversation, Benjy. And I'm cold in this cove. Let's get out of it. If you pursue this subject any further I'll jump out and swim ashore."

"Then I won't pursue it." He was turning the canoe, and the cove was a shadowy water-road leading to the broad lake shining in the sun. "I'll keep still about it. But you wouldn't jump overboard, Sally. You are far too much of a lady ever to go in the water with your clothes on. I don't believe you could possibly do it. If you did, it would shatter all your traditions and inhibitions and everything. Funny, how fundamental it is—that reluctance. It shows that women are related to cats distantly, don't you think so? Thirteenth cousins, perhaps?"

"Benjy," she said, "you have a mind like a grasshopper's. You never know where it's going to land next. Let's paddle fast over to the farmhouse. I'm fairly starving for lunch."

THE days were beautiful, filled with sunlight and blue haze of autumn. Haroot and Sally spent all their time on the lake, paddling and fishing, or else walking on the country roads and trails. It was growing colder; winds whirled down showers of red and yellow leaves; small fallen apples, shriveling, lay beneath old trees along the roads, and goldenrod and asters on the banks were withering to gray and dusty wraiths. Sometimes Haroot and Sally would climb high on the shoulders of a hilly pasture and sit against a sunny sheltered rock. Sally read aloud well; and they got through many political articles in red-backed and green-backed magazines. And sometimes, when he should have been listening, Haroot lay on his back and chewed dry grass and looked up at clouds sailing slowly, and thought of Gerhilde and Valhalla and of Pallas Athene and of her parable of the apple. And he realized that frost was almost upon them and everything was still as it had been.

Sometimes he despaired, and, remembering that question of Michael's, he was sure his sacrifice had been accepted—that Sally's love had been the price that he must pay to bring security to men. And yet the idea was too fantastic, too egoistic. Surely, nothing of one mere mortal's was of great enough importance and of value to affect so vast an issue as the fate of nations or of worlds. And if the plot of Iblees had been foiled and frustrated, it was merely because the frustration fitted with the plans of the Most High.

Now, lying on his back in the warm and prickly grass of the meadow, Haroot wondered that he could ever have been so perturbed about the state of humanity. It was spread so peacefully below him, gray farmhouses and red barns, fields and hills, and trees with their thinned foliage, their gray branches showing. And quiet sounds came to them, children playing and shouting at recess in the small white schoolhouse, like a toy house, at the corners. Somewhere a man was chopping wood in the distance, and from below them came the faint call of a woman in her farmyard summoning her hens.

Here was security and peace, far from the depths and heights of emotion. The celestial regions, the pits of Babel, were equally unreal and far away. Somewhere in the endless distance of the heavens, Michael and Azrael and the others were in the workshops and laboratories of The Highest, bending over great blue prints, making and studying huge charts of the workings of the universe, numbering each man, each sparrow, each small insect. . . . A cricket walked up a grass-blade that Haroot was holding, and he studied the creature, frowning slightly, wondering about its thoughts, its likes and dislikes, its family life.

What if the cricket had come upon a plot of Iblees' and gone clamoring in terror up to the throne of The Highest, crying that the world was doomed? Humiliated, Haroot buried his face upon his arms, and dried grass pricked his forehead. He

had acted like a fool—and yet Michael had not been disapproving. In fact, he had been most kind. He had said that if some people had no fears and doubts the rest would be no better than crabs and oysters.

"After all," Haroot thought, "it is better to have been a fool than to spend your whole life lying contented in mud."

Though, what in the end did it come to? Were you meant to live and struggle and never to grasp happiness at all? Was it always to be a vision, and no reality; a desire, and no fulfillment?—Sally was unyielding. They had not again discussed her decision that the future should be built upon their friendship, but Haroot knew that she had not changed.

"She's as stubborn as a rock," he thought, and looked up at her, reading the article that he had not heard at all.

Her beauty, that he might not touch, was a torment. "There is no use staying here under these conditions," he thought. "I can't go back to Salt-mere. Perhaps it is meant that this is the end of it all!" A bit of dried grass slipped down his throat, and he choked and coughed and sat up, and Sally stopped her reading and looked at him kindly and said:

"Raise your arms above your head. Shall I beat you on the back, Benjy?"

"No, thanks," he said. "Come on, let's go down. I've been lying on a bed of blackberry briars. I've had all I can stand."

That evening he felt as if he were pursued by demons, as if numbers of them crept into the warm living room of the camp and were sitting perched upon the mantel, huddled in dark corners, jeering at him from beneath the wicker table and chairs. Sally, in a soft blue knitted dress, sat by the fire and read an old copy of *Pride and Prejudice* that they had found in the camp; and Haroot was pretending to read a book of Conrad's, but the letters refused to form themselves into coherent sense before his eyes.

There was a cold wind rising, and he thought that soon there would be a storm. Perhaps a snow flurry. In a few days, now, they must leave the camp.

"Sally," he said, and put his book down, "we will have to have it out now, my dear. Am I to come back to Salt-mere, or am I not?"

"As a very good friend, Benjy," she said, and continued reading.

"Put down that cursed book," he said.

She did not do it. He jumped to his feet and grabbed it from her. If she had struggled for it—but she did not struggle. She gave it up easily and said:

"All right, Benjy, don't act like a child."

"You're hopeless." He was bitter. "You women are trained and refined and civilized beyond all nature. If I could only get you angry, really angry!"

"I won't lose my temper, Benjy."

"No, that's the trouble. If you give way a second, you know it will be the first hole in the defense. What is it that keeps you so against me? Something that happened long ago? You don't believe, you won't believe that a man can change, do you? You damn me for the things that Benjy Bingham did. You don't know what Heaven and Hell a man has in him. You couldn't dream what I've been through."

"I've been through a good deal, too, Benjy."

HE LOOKED at her, wondering what she hid by those words, but there was no way of finding out, since she barred him still outside her doors.

"I'm a different man," he said. "I'm not the same man."

"Don't begin that all, again, I beg of you," she said wearily.

"I won't begin it. That's past, too," he said. And it was curious, but he felt that it was all past, that his life as Haroot, his experiences in Valhalla and the celestial regions were so far away and long ago that they could not be caught and transmuted into words. "That is all over," he said, "and I've been trying to show you that I am a decent, pleasant sort after all—that life with me might be rather fun."

"And I've been trying to show you the same thing," she said. "We can be friends and be perfectly happy."

"Not I. I've come to the end, Sally. Open your gates to emotion, my dear, or I shall say good-by."

"Is that an ultimatum?" She looked up at him.

"Yes. Definitely. Don't answer yet. Think it over. I'll go out and pull up the canoe. It's begun to rain."

"Wear your slicker," she said mechanically.

"I don't need the blame thing."

"You do. You'll get drenched. Put it on."

He went into his room and came out with the stiff yellow raincoat, and struggled into it on the doorstep. The wind was rising and waves broke on the beach in a white froth in the darkness. He turned his

ankle going down the steps of the rock, and wet sand dragged at his feet as he walked to the water's edge. The wind whipped and pulled at his slicker and sharp rain smarted against his eyes as he fought with the canoe to haul it farther up the beach. He felt the bottom scrape on a rock and hoped that he had not put a hole in it. Difficult, great things they are to wrestle with alone. Bad to drag them over stones by the bow-end, and you can't get your arms about them at all. But it kept Haroot's mind off Sally a little. He felt awhirl in a great windy darkness, at one minute horribly afraid that she would remain stubborn, then the next minute shivering, almost, with hope.

As he climbed the steps again his ankle pained, badly, and rain drenched his face and ran down inside his collar, and his hands were soaking wet and cold.

He opened the door and shut it behind him softly. Sally had not moved.

"Well?" he said.

She looked up at him and shook her head. "No, Benjy."

"All right," he said. He felt numb, breathless, as if he had been running too far, too hard, and had fallen at the end. There seemed no air in the room, and his legs were shaking, but he must not sit down or stay there even a minute. He must go out into the storm, and he must go quickly. "All right," he said, and leaned against the door. "Good-by, Sally. It's been good to know you. It's all right. Don't worry."

"But you're not going now! You can't go out in this storm. Where are you going?"

"Back to my pit in Babel. Don't worry. I'll stop at the farm and ask them to send the daughter around to spend the night with you. No, I've got to leave." He could not breathe in that room. He turned, and the wind—or was it shrieking fiends, exulting?—seemed to sweep the door open, sweep him out into the night.

Over on the point he could see the light of the farmer's house. He could easily paddle there, and they would drive him to the railroad station. But it was hard getting the canoe down the beach again, and launching it in the waves. Quite a small surf! He had to splash through water to his knees, through it, and it was difficult to climb in and paddle in his slicker. Rather mad to go out in the wind that swept the canoe broadside, tilted it till it shipped water. And water seemed to be coming in the bottom, coming in too fast. Perhaps he had rammed a hole in it when he drew it up the beach.

Wind—or those fiends, perhaps—put their shoulders to the canoe's side, and tilted it over, farther, and farther. The rain would not last long. Clouds were scurrying across the black sky, and for a second the moon's edge shone. His slicker was all about his head, and he was choking with night and cold black water, trying to shout for Sally and yet choking. How foolish it would be to drown so near the shore.

Then there was silence, and a deeper darkness, and a sense of drifting into sleep, till he was roused by something that gripped and dragged him, hauled him by the hair and wrenched him. Iblees! That which he had feared and dreaded with a terror that he could not face. Iblees had come for him. So he must return now to the pit of Babel.

There was a storm and rain about them, and before them was a circle of light, behind which rose, as through a mist, a high black wall, with two great golden gates.

"The gates of Death," Haroot thought. And Iblees was beside him, his hand clutching his arm, pressing his finger-tips into his flesh, holding him too tightly to escape, to try to make a bolt for it. No, there was no hope. In a minute the gates would open, slowly, creaking, and he would pass through with Iblees, down to the lower regions, down to the pit of Babel. For eternity, it would be, now. And such, he knew well, would be his sufferings and his despair that gradually even the memories of happiness, of Sally and the children, of the bright and pleasant garden at Salt-mere, and flowers and teas, and music and laughter—even these memories would be clouded with shadows, dimmed and forgotten. And only shadows would be left, and pain.

"If you had not been fool enough to betray me," Iblees said, "you could have spent all the rest of your life lying in a bed of roses."

"Thank you, but I don't happen to care for your type of roses," Haroot said. "As far as I'm concerned your roses have thorns worse than blackberry briars. I quite prefer to hang by my heels again." Even if all hope had gone, if hell were about to close upon him, he would be defiant, and flippant to the end.

"Have it your own way," Iblees grunted, and Haroot said, recklessly:

"You're really pretty small potatoes, Iblees."

"Why are you calling me Iblees?" the voice said at his elbow.

It was astonishing! It was not Iblees who held him by the arm but a glowing tall creature, with great wings.

"Azrael!" Haroot cried. "But I thought Iblees was taking me to the pit of Babel."

"Nothing of the sort," Azrael said. "You've been out of his jurisdiction for weeks now. I'm taking you to the celestial regions." He was fitting a key in the lock of the gates, and it squeaked as he turned it. The key squeaked like a cry, like a voice, like some one calling. It was some one calling, insistently, wildly—

"Benjy, Benjy—Benjy!"

"Listen!" Haroot said. "Wait, Azrael, a second."

THE gate was ajar and Azrael put his hand on his shoulder, pushing.

"No," Haroot resisted. "Some one is calling me, Azrael. It's my wife. It's Sally. I say, I can't come now. Let me go back to Sally, won't you?"

"Well, I don't know"—Azrael was undecided—"Well, all right then. Good-by, and good luck to you!" He was fading, vanishing, and the golden gates changed to a blur.

Something was squeezing Haroot's back violently, rhythmically, below his shoulder blades.

"One, two, three, four, five." Squash!

Now some one was lifting him up. For a second he thought it was Iblees again. But Iblees would not be sobbing over him, smoothing back his hair, kissing him.

"Benjy, are you all right? You're not dead, Benjy?" It was Sally.

He felt exceedingly weak and ill. In fact, if he had not been so amazed by her behavior, he would have thought it impossible to stagger to his feet. But he was surely far from dead, and he must get up.

"Can you make it?" she said. "Shall I go around by the road and get the farmer?"

"No—five miles, nonsense. I'm perfectly all right," he gasped.

They gripped each other's arms and struggled up the rock steps. Twice he nearly fell, and his ankle hurt unbearably. But they made it; swung the door open to the friendly fire-lighted room.

And was it possible that Sally the calm, the poised, the reasonable, should have hysterics! She stood clutching one side of the table, swaying and trembling and weeping, and water dripped from her wringing wet blue dress and streamed across the floor.

"I thought I heard you call," she sobbed, "and I ran out, and there was a bit of a moon for a second, and I saw the canoe go over and I didn't think I could get you. I didn't think I could make it. You were scarcely over your depth, but the slicker was all over your head and you fought so and kept calling me Iblees and Azrael; and I thought you were going," she gulped.

"Poor darling," he said. "Poor, brave darling."

"And I thought what a beast I'd been, Benjy. A perfect pig, a regular celluloid person."

"Oh, no," he said. His arms were about her, and they clung together, dripping wet and completely happy.

"And you were right. I do love you. But I've been fighting you. I wouldn't admit it."

He ran his hand through her soft wet hair and drew her head back.

"It's all right," he said. And they kissed each other.

"But you're soaking, drenching wet, Benjy," she said. "Go and put some dry clothes on."

"I will—and let's have some toast and coffee. And, Sally," he hesitated, "do you happen to remember—I mean, do you happen to have—I don't suppose you have—"

"What, Benjy?"

"That dragony blue silk wrapper-thing I bought you?"

"Yes, I have it.

"Here?"

"Here."

"Put it on, won't you—please?"

* * *

It was more becoming to her than he had even dreamed it would be. And the toast and coffee were better than the best food he had ever eaten in his life. They sat on the rug before the fire and turned the lamps down, and for awhile discussed the children's schools and what changes they would make in the garden at Salt-mere. Tulips in all the borders, and crocuses on the south slope; and they would build a pool in the center of the grass-place, a pool with water lilies and with gold-fish, with the children sailing small white paper boats there—a pool with white and purple irises standing in the sun about the water's edge.

MASTERS OF FANTASY

Herbert George Wells—WORLD BRAIN—1866-1946

Star-begotten! Homo Superior. A super man in our time. H. G. Wells was an intellectual giant, a visionary of surpassing versatility and innovation. He originated or exploited fantasy themes from the prehistoric to the end of time. A prophet—with honor—for two generations, he predicted war in the air, atomic power, flight to the moon . . . one world or none. His books were broadcast and filmed. He traveled and lectured. His works, piled high, tower beyond the reach of the tallest man; his mind always reached out and pioneered. "War of the Worlds", "Food of the Gods", "When the Sleeper Wakes", "Island of Dr. Moreau", "Things to Come", "The Time Machine"—these were but a tiny portion of his literary legacy. Wisdom was Well's father, Imagination his mother; Truth his God. He was greater than a Master of Fantasy. That he devoted a portion of his time and talent to the creation of memorable stories of the strange and scientific was the extreme good fortune of enthusiasts of fantastic literature.

By Jack London

THE SHADOW AND THE FLASH

Can the moving out of line of even the smallest atom of the Inscrutable pattern of the Universe, bring down the whole great edifice in instantaneous, crashing holocaust?

WHEN I look back, I realize what a peculiar friendship it was. First, there was Lloyd Inwood, tall, slender, and finely knit, nervous and dark. And then Paul Tichlorne, tall, slender, and finely knit, nervous and blond. Each was the replica of the other in everything except color. Lloyd's eyes were black; Paul's were blue. Under stress of excitement, the blood coursed olive in the face of Lloyd, crimson in the face of Paul. But outside this matter of coloring they were as like as two peas. Both were high-strung, prone to excessive tension and endurance, and they lived at concert pitch.

But there was a trio involved in this remarkable friendship, and the third was short, and fat, and chunky, and lazy, and, loath to say, it was I. Paul and Lloyd seemed born to rivalry with each other, and I to be peacemaker between them. We grew up together, the three of us, and full often have I received the angry blows each intended for the other. They were always competing, striving to outdo each other, and when entered upon some such struggle there was no limit either to their endeavors or passions.

This intense spirit of rivalry obtained in their studies and their games. If Paul memorized one canto of "Marmion," Lloyd memorized two cantos, Paul came back with three, and Lloyd again with four, till each knew the whole poem by heart. I remember an incident that occurred at the swimming hole—an incident tragically significant of the life-struggle between them. The boys had a game of diving to the bottom of a ten-foot pool and holding on by submerged roots to see who could stay under the longest. Paul and Lloyd allowed themselves to be bantered into making the descent together. When I saw their faces, set and determined, disappear in the water as they sank swiftly down, I felt a foreboding of something dreadful.

The moments sped, the ripples died away, the face of the pool grew placid and untroubled, and neither black nor golden head broke surface in quest of air. We above grew anxious. The longest record of the longest-winded boy had been exceeded, and still there was no sign. Air bubbles trickled slowly upward, showing that the breath had been expelled from their lungs, and after that the bubbles ceased to trickle upward. Each second became interminable, and, unable longer to endure the suspense, I plunged into the water.

I found them down at the bottom, clutching tight to the roots, their heads not a foot apart, their eyes wide open, each glaring fixedly at the other. They were suf-

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At once, as the door swung inward on its hinges, the whole interior of the laboratory impinged upon my vision. . . .

fering frightful torment, writhing and twisting in the pangs of voluntary suffocation; for neither would let go and acknowledge himself beaten. I tried to break Paul's hold on the root, but he resisted me fiercely. Then I lost my breath and came to the surface, badly scared. I quickly explained the situation, and half a dozen of us went down and by main strength tore them loose. By the time we got them out, both were unconscious, and it was only after much barrel-rolling and rubbing and pounding that they finally came to their senses. They would have drowned there, had no one rescued them.

When Paul Tichlorne entered college, he let it be generally understood that he was going in for the social sciences. Lloyd Inwood, entering at the same time, elected to take the same course. But Paul had had it secretly in mind all the time to study the natural sciences, specializing on chemistry, and at the last moment he switched over. Though Lloyd had already arranged his year's work and attended the first lectures, he at once followed Paul's lead and went in for the natural sciences and especially for chemistry.

Their rivalry soon became a noted thing throughout the university. Each was a spur to the other, and they went into chemistry deeper than did ever students before—so deep, in fact, that ere they took their sheepskins they could have stumped any chemistry or "cow college" professor in the institution, save "old" Moss, head of the department, and even him they puzzled and edified more than once. Lloyd's discovery of the "death Bacillus" of the sea toad, and his experiments on it with potassium cyanide, sent his name and that of his university ringing round the world; nor was Paul a whit behind when he succeeded in producing laboratory colloids exhibiting amoeba-like activities, and when he cast new light upon the processes of fertilization through his startling experiments with simple sodium chlorides and magnesium solutions on low forms of marine life.

It was in their undergraduate days, however, in the midst of their profoundest plunges into the mysteries of organic chemistry, that Doris Van Benschoten entered into their lives. Lloyd met her first, but within twenty-four hours Paul saw to it that he also made her acquaintance. Of course, they fell in love with her, and she became the only thing in life worth living for.

They wooed her with equal ardor and fire, and so intense became their struggle for her that half the student-body took to wagering wildly on the result. Even "old" Moss, one day, after an astounding demonstration in his private laboratory by Paul, was guilty to the extent of a month's salary of backing him to become the bridegroom of Doris Van Benschoten.

In the end she solved the problem in her own way, to everybody's satisfaction except Paul's and Lloyd's. Getting them together, she said that she really could not choose between them because she loved them both equally well; and that, unfortunately, since polyandry was not permitted in the United States she would be compelled to forego the honor and happiness of marrying either of them. Each blamed the other for this lamentable outcome, and the bitterness between them grew more bitter.

BUT THINGS came to a head soon enough. It was at my home, after they had taken their degrees and dropped out of the world's sight, that the beginning of the end came to pass. Both were men of means, with little inclination and no necessity for professional life. My friendship and their mutual animosity were the two things that linked them in any way together. While they were very often at my place, they made it a fastidious point to avoid each other on such visits, though it was inevitable, under the circumstances, that they should come upon each other occasionally.

On the day I have in recollection, Paul Tichlorne had been mooning all morning in my study over a current scientific review. This left me free to my own affairs, and I was out among my roses when Lloyd Inwood arrived. Clipping and pruning and tacking the climbers on the porch, with my mouth full of nails, and Lloyd following me about and lending a hand now and again, we fell to discussing the mythical race of invisible people, that strange and vagrant people the traditions of which have come down to us. Lloyd warmed to the talk in his nervous, jerky fashion, and was soon interrogating the physical properties and possibilities of invisibility. A perfectly black object, he contended, would elude and defy the acutest vision.

"Color is a sensation," he was saying. "It has no objective reality. Without light, we can see neither colors nor objects themselves. All objects are black in the dark, and in the dark it is impossible to see

them. If no light strikes upon them, then no light is flung back from them to the eye, and so we have no vision-evidence of their being."

"But we see black objects in daylight," I objected.

"Very true," he went on warmly. "And that is because they are not perfectly black. Were they perfectly black, absolutely black, as it were, we could not see them —ay, not in the blaze of a thousand suns could we see them! And so I say, with the right pigments, properly compounded, an absolutely black paint could be produced which would render invisible whatever it was applied to."

"It would be a remarkable discovery," I said noncommittally, for the whole thing seemed too fantastic for aught but speculative purposes.

"Remarkable!" Lloyd slapped me on the shoulder. "I should say so! Why, old chap, to coat myself with such a paint would be to put the world at my feet. The secrets of kings and courts would be mine, the machinations of diplomats and politicians, the play of stock-gamblers, the plans of trusts and corporations. I could keep my hand on the inner pulse of things and become the greatest power in the world. And I—" He broke off shortly, then added, "Well, I have begun my experiments, and I don't mind telling you that I'm right in line for it."

A laugh from the doorway startled us. Paul Tichlorne was standing there, a smile of mockery on his lips.

"You forget, my dear Lloyd," he said.

"Forget what?"

"You forget," Paul went on— "ah, you forget the shadow."

I saw Lloyd's face drop, but he answered sneeringly, "I can carry a sunshade, you know." Then he turned suddenly and fiercely upon him. "Look here, Paul, you'll keep out of this if you know what's good for you."

A rupture seemed imminent, but Paul laughed good-naturedly. "I wouldn't lay fingers on your dirty pigments. Succeed beyond your most sanguine expectations, yet you will always fetch up against the shadow. You can't get away from it. Now I shall go on the very opposite tack. In the very nature of my proposition the shadow will be eliminated—"

"Transparency!" ejaculated Lloyd, instantly. "But it can't be achieved."

"Oh, no; of course not." And Paul shrugged his shoulders and strolled off.

This was the beginning of it. Both men attacked the problem with all the tremendous energy for which they were noted, and with a rancor and bitterness that made me tremble for the success of either. Each trusted me to the utmost, and in the long weeks of experimentation that followed I was made a party to both sides, listening to their theorizings and witnessing their demonstrations. Never, by word or sign, did I convey to either the slightest hint of the other's progress, and they respected me for the seal which I always put upon my lips.

Lloyd Inwood, after prolonged and unintermittent application, when the tension upon his mind and body became too great to bear, had a strange way of obtaining relief. He attended prize fights. It was at one of these brutal exhibitions, whither he had dragged me in order to tell his latest results, that his theory received striking confirmation.

"Do you see that red-whiskered man?" he asked, pointing across the ring to the fifth tier of seats on the opposite side. "And do you see the next man to him, the one in the white hat? Well, there is quite a gap between them, is there not?"

"Certainly," I answered. "They are a seat apart. The gap is the unoccupied seat."

He leaned over to me and spoke seriously. "Between the red-whiskered man and the white-hatted man sits Ben Wasson. You have heard me speak of him. He is the cleverest pugilist of his weight in the country. He is also a Caribbean Negro, full-blooded, and the blackest in the United States. He has on a black overcoat buttoned up. I saw him when he came in and took that seat. As soon as he sat down he disappeared. Watch closely; he may smile."

I was for crossing over to verify Lloyd's statement, but he restrained me. "Wait," he said.

I waited and watched, till the red-whiskered man turned his head as though addressing the unoccupied seat; and then, in that empty space, I saw the rolling whites of a pair of eyes and the white double-crescent of two rows of teeth, and for the instant I could make out a Negro's face. But with the passing of the smile his visibility passed, and the chair seemed vacant as before.

"Were he perfectly black, you could sit alongside him and not see him," Lloyd said; and I confess the illustration was apt

enough to make me well-nigh convinced.

I VISITED Lloyd's laboratory a number of times after that, and found him always deep in his search after the absolute black. His experiments covered all sorts of pigments, such as lamp-blacks, tars, carbonized vegetable matters, soots of oils and fats, and the various carbonized animal substances.

"White light is composed of the seven primary colors," he argued to me. "But it is itself, of itself, invisible. Only by being reflected from objects do it and the objects become visible. But only that portion of it that is reflected becomes visible. For instance, here is a blue tobacco-box. The white light strikes against it, and, with one exception, all its component colors—violet, indigo, green, yellow, orange, and red—are absorbed. The one exception is *blue*. It is not absorbed, but reflected. Wherefore the tobacco-box gives us a sensation of blueness. We do not see the other colors because they are absorbed. We see only the blue. For the same reason grass is *green*. The green waves of white light are thrown upon our eyes."

"When we paint our houses, we do not apply color to them," he said at another time. "What we do is to apply certain substances that have the property of absorbing from white light all the colors except those that we would have our houses appear. When a substance reflects all the colors to the eye, it seems to us white. When it absorbs all the colors, it is black. But, as I said before, we have as yet no perfect black. *All* the colors are not absorbed. The perfect black, guarding against high lights, will be utterly and absolutely invisible. Look at that, for example."

He pointed to the palette lying on his work-table. Different shades of black pigments were brushed on it. One, in particular, I could hardly see. It gave my eyes a blurring sensation, and I rubbed them and looked again.

"That," he said impressively, "is the blackest black you or any mortal man ever looked upon. But just you wait, and I'll have a black so black that no mortal man will be able to look upon it—*and see it!*"

On the other hand, I used to find Paul Tichlorne plunged as deeply into the study of light polarization, diffraction, and interference, single and double refraction and all manner of strange organic compounds.

"Transparency: a state or quality of body which permits all rays of light to pass through," he defined for me. "That is what I am seeking. Lloyd blunders up against the shadow with her perfect opaqueness. But I escape it. A transparent body casts no shadow; neither does it reflect light-waves—that is, the perfectly transparent does not. So, avoiding high lights, not only will such a body cast no shadow, but, since it reflects no light, it will also be invisible."

We were standing by the window at another time. Paul was engaged in polishing a number of lenses, which were ranged along the sill. Suddenly, after a pause in the conversation , he said, "Oh! I've dropped a lens. Stick your head out, old man, and see where it went to."

Out I started to thrust my head, but a sharp blow on the forehead caused me to recoil. I rubbed my bruised brow and gazed with reproachful inquiry at Paul, who was laughing in gleeful, boyish fashion.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" I echoed.

"Why don't you investigate?" he demanded. And investigate I did. Before thrusting out my head, my senses, active, had told me there was nothing there, that nothing intervened between me and out-of-doors, that the aperture of the window opening was utterly empty. I stretched forth my hand and felt a hard object, smooth and cool and flat, which my touch, out of its experience, told me to be glass. I looked again, but could see positively nothing.

"White quartzose sand," Paul rattled off, "sodic carbonate, slaked lime, cullet, manganese peroxide— there you have it, the finest French plate glass, made by the great St. Gobain Company, who made the finest plate glass in the world, and this is the finest piece they ever made. It cost a king's ransom. But look at it! You can't see it. You don't know it's there till you run your head against it.

"Eh, old boy! That's merely an object-lesson—certain elements, in themselves opaque, yet so compounded as to give a resultant body which is transparent. But that is a matter of inorganic chemistry, you say. Very true. But I dare to assert, standing here on my two feet, that in the organic I can duplicate whatever occurs in the inorganic.

"Here!" He held a test-tube between me and the light, and I noted the cloudy or muddy liquid it contained. He emptied the contents of another test-tube into it, and

almost instantly it became clear and sparkling.

"Or here!" With quick, nervous movements among his array of test-tubes, he turned a white solution to a wine color, and a light yellow solution to a dark brown. He dropped a piece of litmus paper into an acid, when it changed instantly to red, and on floating it in an alkali it turned as quickly to blue.

"The litmus paper is still the litmus paper," he enunciated in the formal manner of the lecturer. "I have not changed it into something else. Then what did I do? I merely changed the arrangement of its molecules. Where, at first, it absorbed all colors from the light but red, its molecular structure was so changed that it absorbed red and all colors except blue. And so it goes, *ad infinitum*. Now, what I propose to do is this."

He paused for a space.

"I propose to seek—ay, and to find—the proper reagents, which, acting upon the living organism, will bring about molecular changes analogous to those you have just witnessed. But these reagents, which I shall find, and for that matter, upon which I already have my hands, will not turn the living body to blue or red or black, but they will turn it to transparency. All light will pass through it. It will be invisible. It will cast no shadow."

A few weeks later I went hunting with Paul. He had been promising me for some time that I should have the pleasure of shooting over a wonderful dog—the most wonderful dog, in fact, that ever man shot over, so he averred, and continued to aver till my curiosity was aroused. But on the morning in question I was disappointed, for there was no dog in evidence.

"Don't see him about," Paul remarked, unconcernedly, and we set off across the fields.

I COULD not imagine, at the time, what was ailing me, but I had a feeling of some impending and deadly illness. My nerves were all awry, and, from the astounding tricks they played me, my senses seemed to have run riot. Strange sounds disturbed me. At times I heard the swish-swish of grass being shoved aside, and once the patter of feet across a patch of stony ground.

"Did you hear anything, Paul?" I asked once.

But he shook his head, and thrust his feet steadily forward.

While climbing a fence, I heard the low, eager whine of a dog, apparently from within a couple of feet of me; but on looking about me I saw nothing.

I dropped to the ground, limp and trembling.

"Paul," I said, "we had better return to the house. I am afraid I am going to be sick."

"Nonsense, old man," he answered. "The sunshine has gone to your head like wine. You'll be all right. It's famous weather."

But, passing along a narrow path through a clump of cottonwoods, some object brushed against my legs and I stumbled and nearly fell. I looked with sudden anxiety at Paul.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Tripping over your own feet?"

I kept my tongue between my teeth and plodded on, though sore perplexed and thoroughly satisfied that some acute and mysterious malady had attacked my nerves. So far my eyes had escaped; but, when we got to the open fields again, even my vision went back on me. Strange flashes of varicolored, rainbow light began to appear and disappear on the path before me. Still, I managed to keep myself in hand, till the varicolored lights persisted for a space of fully twenty seconds, dancing and flashing in continuous play. Then I sat down, weak and shaky.

"It's all up with me," I gasped, covering my eyes with my hands. "It has attacked my eyes. Paul, take me home."

But Paul laughed long and loud. "What did I tell you?—the most wonderful dog, eh? Well, what do you think?"

He turned partly from me and began to whistle. I heard the patter of feet, the panting of a heated animal, and the unmistakable yelp of a dog. Then Paul stooped down and apparently fondled the empty air.

"Here! Give me your fist."

And he rubbed my hand over the cold nose and jowls of a dog. A dog it certainly was, with the shape and the smooth, short coat of a pointer.

Suffice to say, I speedily recovered my spirits and control. Paul put a collar about the animal's neck and tied his handkerchief to its tail. And then was vouchsafed us the remarkable sight of an empty collar and a waving handkerchief cavorting over the fields. It was something to see that collar and handkerchief pin a bevy of quail in a clump of locusts and remain rigid and immovable till we had flushed the birds.

Now and again the dog emitted the varicolored light-flashes I have mentioned. The one thing, Paul explained, which he had not anticipated and which he doubted could be overcome.

"They're a large family," he said, "these sun dogs, wind dogs, rainbows, halos, and parhelia. They are produced by refraction of light from mineral and ice crystals, from mist, rain, spray, and no end of things; and I am afraid they are the penalty I must pay for transparency. I escaped Lloyd's shadow only to fetch up against the rainbow flash."

A couple of days later, before the entrance to Paul's laboratory, I encountered a terrible stench. So overpowering was it that it was easy to discover the source—a mass of putrescent matter on the doorstep which in general outlines resembled a dog.

Paul was startled when he investigated my find. It was his invisible dog, or rather, what had been his invisible dog, for it was now plainly visible. It had been playing about but a few minutes before in all health and strength. Closer examination revealed that the skull had been crushed by some heavy blow. While it was strange that the animal should have been killed, the inexplicable thing was that it should decay so quickly.

"The reagents I injected into its system were harmless," Paul explained. "Yet they were powerful, and it appears that when death comes they force practically instantaneous disintegration. Remarkable! Most remarkable! Well, the only thing is not to die. They do not harm so long as one lives. But I do wonder who smashed in that dog's head."

Light, however, was thrown upon this when a frightened housemaid brought the news that Gaffer Bedshaw had that very morning, not more than an hour back, gone violently insane, and was strapped down at home, in the huntsman's lodge, where he raved of a battle with a ferocious and gigantic beast that he had encountered in the Tichlorne pasture. He claimed that the thing, whatever it was, was invisible, that with his own eyes he had seen that it was invisible; wherefore his tearful wife and daughters shook their heads, and wherefore he but waxed the more violent, and the gardener and the coachman tightened the straps by another hole.

Nor, while Paul Tichlorne was thus successfully mastering the problem of invisibility, was Lloyd Inwood a whit behind. I went over in answer to a message of his to come and see how he was getting on. Now his laboratory occupied an isolated situation in the midst of his vast grounds. It was built in a pleasant little glade, surrounded on all sides by a dense forest growth, and was to be gained by way of a winding and erratic path. But I had travelled that path so often as to know every foot of it, and conceive my surprise when I came upon the glade and found no laboratory. The quaint shed structure with its red sandstone chimney was not. Nor did it look as if it ever had been. There were no signs of ruin, or débris, nothing.

I STARTED to walk across what had once been the site of the laboratory. "This," I said to myself, "should be where the step went up to the door." Barely were the words out of my mouth when I stubbed my toe on some obstacle, pitched forward, and butted my head into something that *felt* very much like a door. I reached out my hand. It *was* a door. I found the knob and turned it. And at once, as the door swung inward on its hinges, the whole interior of the laboratory impinged upon my vision.

Greeting Lloyd, I closed the door and backed up the path a few paces. I could see nothing of the building. Returning and opening the door, at once all the furniture and every detail of the interior were visible. It was indeed startling, the sudden transition from void to light and form and color.

"What do you think of it, eh?" Lloyd asked, wringing my hand. "I slapped a couple of coats of absolute black on the outside yesterday afternoon to see how it worked. How's your head? You bumped it pretty solidly, I imagine."

"Never mind that," he interrupted my congratulations. "I've something better for you to do."

While he talked he began to strip, and when he stood naked before me he thrust a pot and brush into my hand and said, "Here, give me a coat of this."

It was an oily, shellac-like stuff, which spread quickly and easily over the skin and dried immediately.

"Merely preliminary and precautionary," he explained when I had finished; "but now for the real stuff."

I picked up another pot he indicated, and glanced inside, but could see nothing.

"It's empty," I said.

"Stick your finger in it."

I obeyed, and was aware of a sensation of cool moistness. On withdrawing my hand I glanced at the forefinger, the one I had immersed, but it had disappeared. I moved it, and knew from the alternate tension and relaxation of the muscles that I moved it, but it defied my sense of sight. To all appearances I had been shorn of a finger; nor could I get any visual impression of it till I extended it under the skylight and saw its shadow plainly blotted on the floor.

Lloyd chuckled. "Now spread it on, and keep your eyes open."

I dipped the brush into the seemingly empty pot, and gave him a long stroke across his chest. With the passage of the brush the living flesh disappeared from beneath. I covered his right leg, and he was a one-legged man defying all laws of gravitation. And so, stroke by stroke, member by member, I painted Lloyd Inwood into nothingness. It was a creepy experience, and I was glad when naught remained in sight but his burning black eyes, poised apparently unsupported in mid-air.

"I have a refined and harmless solution for them," he said. "A fine spray with an air-brush, and presto! I am not."

This deftly accomplished, he said, "Now I shall move about, and do you tell me what sensations you experience."

"In the first place, I cannot see you," I said, and I could hear his gleeful laugh from the midst of the emptiness. "Of course," I continued, "you cannot escape your shadow, but that was to be expected. When you pass between my eye and an object, the object disappears, but so unusual and incomprehensible is its disappearance that it seems to me as though my eyes had blurred. When you move rapidly, I experience a bewildering succession of blurs. The blurring sensation makes my eyes ache and my brain tired.

"Have you any other warnings of my presence?" he asked.

"No, and yes," I answered. "When you are near me I have feelings similar to those produced by dank warehouses, gloomy crypts, and deep mines. And as sailors feel the loom of the land on dark nights, so I think I feel the loom of your body. But it is all very vague and intangible."

Long we talked that last morning in his laboratory; and when I turned to go, he put his unseen hand in mine with nervous grip, and said, "Now I shall conquer the world!" And I could not dare to tell him of Paul Tichlorne's equal success.

At home I found a note from Paul, asking me to come up immediately, and it was high noon when I came spinning up the driveway on my wheel. Paul called me from the tennis court, and I dismounted and went over. But the court was empty. As I stood there, gaping open-mouthed, a tennis ball struck me on the arm, and another whizzed past my ear.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

"The Purple Sapphire"

by John Taine

Remember "The Greatest Adventure"? Or "Before the Dawn"? We are now privileged to present a third and perhaps the greatest of the many celebrated fantasy adventure novels from the pen of John Taine. Here's a story where danger and high adventure walk hand in hand into the strangest, darkest trail ever followed by man! Don't fail to reserve your copy now!

The big August issue will be on sale June 18!

For aught I could see of my assailant, they came whirling at me from out of space, and right well was I peppered with them. But when the balls already flung at me began to come back for the second whack, I realized the situation. Seizing a racquet and keeping my eyes open, I quickly saw a rainbow flash appearing and disappearing and darting over the ground. I took out after it, and when I laid the racquet upon it for a half-dozen stout blows, Paul's voice rang out:

"Enough! Enough! Oh! Ouch! Stop! You're landing on my naked skin, you know! Ow! O-w-w! I'll be good! I'll be good! I only wanted you to see my metamorphosis," he said ruefully, and I imagined that he was rubbing his hurts.

A few minutes later we were playing tennis—a handicap on my part, for I could have no knowledge of his position save when all the angles between himself, the sun, and me, were in proper conjunction. Then he flashed, and only then. But the flashes were more brilliant than the rainbow—purest blue, most delicate violet, brightest yellow, and all the intermediary shades, with the scintillant brilliancy of the diamond, dazzling, blinding, iridescent.

But in the midst of our play I felt a sudden cold chill, reminding me of deep mines and gloomy crypts, such a chill as I had experienced that very morning. The next moment, close to the net, I saw a ball rebound in mid-air and empty space, and at the same instant, a score of feet away, Paul Tichlorne emitted a rainbow flash. It could not be he from whom the ball rebounded, and with sickening dread I realized that Lloyd Inwood had come upon the scene. To make sure, I looked for his shadow, and there it was, a shapeless blotch the girth of his body, (the sun was overhead), moving along the ground. I remembered his threat, and felt sure that all the long years of rivalry were about to culminate in an uncanny battle.

I cried a warning to Paul, and heard a snarl as of a wild beast, and an answering snarl. I saw the dark blotch move swiftly across the court, and a brilliant burst of vari-colored light moving with equal swiftness to meet it; and then shadow and flash came together and there was the sound of unseen blows. The net went down before my frightened eyes. I sprang toward the fighters, crying:

"For God's sake!"

But their locked bodies smote against my knees, and I was overthrown.

"You keep out of this, old man!" I heard the voice of Lloyd Inwood from out of the emptiness. And then Paul's voice crying, "Yes, we've had enough of peacemaking."

From the sound of their voices I knew they had separated. I could not locate Paul, and so approached the shadow that represented Lloyd. But from the other side came a stunning blow on the point of my jaw, and I heard Paul scream angrily, "Now will you keep away?"

Then they came together again, the impact of their blows, their groans and gasps, and the swift flashings and shadow-movings telling plainly of the deadliness of the struggle.

I shouted for help, and Gaffer Bedshaw came running into the court. I could see, as he approached, that he was looking at me strangely, but he collided with the combatants and was hurled headlong to the ground. With despairing shriek and a cry of "O Lord, I've got 'em!" he sprang to his feet and tore madly out of the court.

I could do nothing, so I sat up, fascinated and powerless, and watched the struggle. The noonday sun beat down with dazzling brightness on the naked tennis court. And it *was* naked. All I could see was the blotch of shadow and the rainbow flashes, the dust rising from the invisible feet, the earth tearing up from beneath the straining foot-grips, and the wire screen bulge once or twice as their bodies hurled against it. That was all, and after a time even that ceased. There were no more flashes, and the shadow had become long and stationary; and I remembered their set boyish faces when they clung to the roots in the deep coolness of the pool.

They found me an hour afterward. Some inkling of what had happened got to the servants and they quitted the Tichlorne service in a body. Gaffer Bedshaw never recovered from the second shock he received, and is confined in a madhouse, hopelessly incurable. The secrets of their marvelous discoveries died with Paul and Lloyd, both laboratories being destroyed by grief-stricken relatives. As for myself, I no longer care for chemical research, and science is a tabooed topic in my household. I have returned to my roses. Nature's colors are good enough for me.

(Continued from page 6)

ARISTOCRAT OF THE PULPS!

Once more, I feel a need to take my pen in hand and air my views in "Viewpoints".

First I would like to say that, through the costly trial-and-error method, I've finally concluded that your magazine is the best twenty-five cent value on earth, Mars, or any other planet. How you can put such excellent literature and art between two covers is beyond me; and all for one fourth of a dollar. In my humble opinion, F.F.M. is the Aristocrat of the Pulps, the acme of stf perfection. Now that F.N. is back again, I suppose you will have a close-running mate, but still F.F.M. will no doubt stay in first honors with me.

I should like to say that more of George Whitley's work will be appreciated, as will more of artist Lawrence. I'll bet another splendid Lawrence portfolio could be assembled from just the art in the last few issues.

For a possible novel for either F.F.M. or F.N., may I suggest Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"? It is quite rare, at least around these parts, and if illustrated by Lawrence, it would help to make one of the best issues of any magazine ever published. Bram Stoker's "Dracula" would also be quite good for your pages. It is also among the unobtainable.

Perhaps because of those last two suggestions, I shall be branded a "weirdist". That term will probably fit me like a glove, for while reading Whitley's vampire tale "And Not in Peace", I was really in a bit of "Star-Rover's Paradise". Bring on lots and lots of werewolf, monster, and vampire stories. To me, they represent an ideal blending of both science and fantasy.

Did any of your readers ever attempt reading a tale like Whitley's in a graveyard about midnight? I should like to try it sometime, especially if there is a gentle wind and the moon is full. It would be quite interesting. Besides, you would get to the utmost thrill from such writings as that.

As a closing note, I want to thank you for printing my request in a former issue. I was deluged with mail from all points of America.

Cordially,

BOB BOYER.

243 Rowe St.,
Tamaqua, Pa.

WANTS FRANK R. PAUL

Congratulations on the revival of *Fantastic Novels!* This event is the best news the fantasy world has had for a long, long time. I'm still black and blue from pinching myself; seems as thought I *must* be dreaming—it's too good to be true! And with Munsey reprints!

Incidentally, it seems to me, looking in from the outside, that here is a striking example of editorial policy being influenced by readers' letters. The "Readers' Viewpoint" columns of F.F.M. have indicated an overwhelming demand for the Munsey stories, and the revival of F.N. looks like a direct response to that demand. Of course, right from the start you've been known as an editor unusually responsive to the readers' wishes. Which probably accounts in large part for the sort of "family" feeling that seems to exist among F.F.M.'s readers.

Doubtless in planning F.N. you've reviewed the letters in which readers have asked for various Munsey stories. I'll just mention briefly that I see a need for prompt publication of the following:

Stilson: "Minos of Sardanes"; "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian."

Serviss: "The Moon Maiden."

Smith: "After a Million Years."

Flint: "The Queen of Life"; "The Planeteer"; "The King of Conserve Island"; "The Emancipatrix"; "The Man in the Moon"; "Out of the Moon."

Leinster: "The Mad Planet"; "The Red Dust".

England: "The Fatal Gift"—indeed, all the rest of his fantasies.

And I'd like to put in a good word for Max Brand's "Devil Ritter" and Edgar Rice Burroughs' rare and very entertaining "The Resurrection of Jimber-Jaw."

Is there any possibility of your regaining the services of Frank R. Paul? F.N. won't be the same without his scienti-fictional drawings.

While I'm writing, here are some brief comments on F.F.M. You've been publishing material of good quality right along, but I think the letters in the Readers' Viewpoint show that I have lots of company in feeling that the magazine has been in a dreadful rut lately.

So how about something different? Some real weird novels, like "The Undying Monster," would be welcome; something futuristic, something interplanetary, something strange and unusual. Not a straight diet of science fiction, nor of weird, nor of fantastic adventure—*Variety!*

Aside from its monotony, the diet you've been feeding us has been (so to speak) quite tasty.

Anyway, good luck with the revived *Fantastic Novels*, and best wishes for a successful 1948.

PAUL SPENCER.

88 Ardmore Rd.,
West Hartford, Conn.

Editors Note: Some of your wishes for F.N. have already been attended to.

ABOUT A LAWRENCE MASTERPIECE

I am going to devote this letter entirely to the masterpiece of art that appeared on page twenty-three of the February F.F.M.; although usually I discuss my opinions of each story, giving a brief rating and razzing the ones that strike me as corn.

The picture shows a wall between a clawing torn-clothed, man who's wife lies silently at his feet with a dead baby lying across her; a wall between this wrecked creature and a man and woman holding hands in a garden while a small girl picks flowers; and in the background is a tree that overlaps the wall. On one side is a tree bursting with the rapture of growth and greenness, but the other branches that overlap are a dismal gray, leafless, forlorn, without hope.

That picture eloquently symbolizes the profound problem before Mankind today. A third

(Continued on page 118)

Man—the all knowing, all powerful—wasn't the first to walk this earth . . . nor will he be the last. . . .

EEMANU GROWS UP

By Leslie A. Croutch

LITTLE Eemanu picked up the basket of bones and went swinging merrily off down the broken pavement. It was a gay day with the sun riding high in a cloudless blue vault. He felt very happy and very free. His nostrils quivered as he breathed deeply of the spring-laden air.

At a turn in the winding path he was hailed by a squawky voice from the trees. He looked up at the wildly colored bird riding the swaying branch.

"Where are you going with that basket of bones?" it asked.

Little Eemanu replied, "It is my turn today to feed the humans."

The bird opened its beak in a wide yawn. "How boring," said he. "I do not see why you do it."

"Neither do I. If it were up to me, I would let them starve. But Old Nabob and the Old Ones say we have to feed them so they will not die."

"Harrumph!"

Little Eemanu continued his dancing journey, his tail flicking this way and that in a merry fashion. Once he stopped to converse with a cousin of his who sat on a piece of concrete, searching diligently for parasites.

"Blame it all, anyway," he grumbled in reply to Eemanu's greeting. "Here we go and get rid of our own and then we've got to be plagued to death by common lice."

"It serves you right," said Eemanu. "You have been warned often enough to stay out of the houses; especially the big ones that are full of beds."

"Gol-ding humans, anyway! Even when we've got them put where they cannot start anything, their little pests bother us. Blast the little jiggers!"

Eemanu scampered off. It was difficult to keep his mind on one thing very long unless action was involved. He knew this, but it didn't worry him. Old Quenu, the teacher, had told him that when he got to be a little older, he would be able to concentrate.

He didn't think that this was possible. It was far more fun to swing by his tail through the trees and throw fruit at the others in the park.

He came to a place where the walk he was following passed beneath an arch, its top broken so that only a few words of the inscription were left. He stopped and looked up at it. The words looked the same as they had yesterday and the day before that. He had been told that he would be able to read some of the little words soon. Puckering up his mouth, he emitted incoherent noises, Breaking off, he looked around, frightened. There was a penalty, not very severe to be sure, but

"Now, we are able to read the books. . . ." said Eemanu.

highly embarrassing, for slipping into animal habits.

But he did know the gist of the inscription. One of the big apes had told him it meant a place of cages where animals had been kept. He tried to pronounce the word, but all he managed was something that sounded like "Schoo."

Eager to get his errand over with, he didn't tarry long. Inside, the path curved gently to the right. They would be out today. He had been doing this since winter when the snow had been thick on the ground and they had all been inside. Now, he knew, the doors would be open and they would be out, sunning themselves, walking about. He wanted to get a good look at the humans. He hadn't seen one clearly yet.

He rounded the bend and came in full view of the cages.

There were several humans in the first, most of them sitting, heads held in their hands. Eemanu was interested to note that their hands looked a lot like his. The rest were either walking about or standing, gripping the bars, staring out at the world.

Eemanu halted several feet away and studied them. Golly, he thought, they walk just like me! But their arms are too short, he thought, on closer examination. He wondered how they got about in the trees, then remembered they didn't do that. Quenu had told the animals at school that the humans had other means of traveling.

He wondered what they were talking about. None of the apes had been able to figure that out yet, for certain. What dogs could talk claimed they understood a lot of the words, but nobody had proven that. They guessed they must have words, though, for they had written them in books. Only now were some of the Old Ones getting to the point where a few of the easier passages could be deciphered.

Growing weary of his inspection, Eemanu edged closer. Reaching into the basket, he drew out one of the bones, to which shreds of meat hung, rawly. This he tossed through the bars. One of the humans leaped on it, clutched it to his bosom. Three of the other humans landed on top of him, then, and a fight ensued.

Eemanu watched, fascinated. Golly, he thought, what a way to fight. You'd never catch us monkeys being that dirty. Look at that one male kick the other. We'd never make another monkey's nose bleed that way. He shuddered and thanked his lucky stars he was civilized.

One by one the bones went into the cage. In almost every case mêlée resulted. Finally, tired of the growling and the sight of blood, he left. There was one cage left, and it was down the path a little, around another bend.

IT WAS not until he had come within a few feet that he saw the sprung bars, one of them wrenched from its moorings in the rotting concrete.

Immediately he swung into the protective branches of a nearby tree. There he cocked his head, straining his ears. No strange sound came to him. There were only the familiar ones of the birds, the bark of a dog, the voices of two cats grumbling over something. Cautiously, he swung from the tree to its neighbor, from that to the next and so on—to finally leap over the broken arch to the pavement and run helter-skelter toward town.

By chance, an Old One halted his precipitate rush.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, little monkey?" he asked.

Eemanu forgot the tabus against animalisms. His puckered mouth garbled and whistled. He jumped up and down and flapped his long arms, pointed and grunted and snorted.

He managed to convey that something was wrong.

An old she ape lumbered up. He leaped into her arms, wrapped his about her neck. She caressed his back, and finally he quieted to a state of semi-normalcy.

"Whoo — whoo — wsssst — human — bars bust—gone!"

Then all was commotion. The Old One leaped straight up, turned around so he was facing the way he had come, and, great legs pumping, was off for aid. The old she ape dropped Eemanu and followed. Eemanu trailed along behind as best he might, tail curled high like a battle flag, aiding himself along with one arm, the other waving in the air.

* * *

Most of the animals turned up for the hunt. The dogs were there, grumbling and snarling at each other, but otherwise keeping the peace. The cats were independent, as usual. They sat on the sidelines, looking superior, and couldn't quite decide whether to cooperate or not. Old Nabob snorted through his trunk. The Old Ones sat, silent, watching and waiting for

silence to give them a chance to speak. When it did come, they were ready.

"A human has escaped," the eldest of the octet stumped forward to roar.

A bedlam of animal cries greeted his announcement, as enthusiastic as though they did not know already what was up. Old Nabob trumpeted shrilly, bringing order.

The Old One continued. "You know what will happen if a human goes free and aids other humans to escape. They are dangerous. They will bring their cars that fly in the sky, their buggies that run without horses, and will kill us and destroy our land."

Assent was unanimous, even from the cats.

"We must capture him. Alive, if possible. We do not believe in killing, but sometimes it is necessary. If this is one of those times—then kill we must!"

There was little organization to the hunt. They had not enjoyed their new status of superiority long enough for that. The dogs still would not associate with the cats; Old Nabob, the oldest of them all, kept to himself because of his size; the great apes felt better than the little apes and the monkeys. Even now, when it was to their common good that they get together and stick together, each was going his own way, hunting in his own fashion, hoping to succeed ahead of his fellows.

It was all rather confusing to the little monkey. He sat on a large stump, nibbling contemplatively on an apple, and pondered the ways of his elders. They thought they had all the brains, he was ruminating. Now, if he'd been doing this, he would have got one of the bloodhounds to follow the man's tracks.

Rapidly, he was maturing. The border line between learning days and doing days was sharply defined. Suddenly, in the space of a few days, indecision would vanish, and in its place would appear the ability to reason clearly; to think things through to their logical conclusion. Then it was that their newly awakened brains would come into the heritage given them by the Great Flames.

Eemanu finished the apple and went off in search of the grey old she ape that taught them in their school. She would know the answers. She was wise.

He found her quickly, squatting amid her great piles of books, a pair of bent-frame spectacles perched on her nose. He sat and watched her for a long time. She was cranky when it was hot, and a sudden interruption would make her lash out with that long arm of hers. Eemanu had landed several feet away on more than one occasion.

But finally she deigned to notice him. Laying down the book, she bent her head, looking over the top of the glasses in a manner like that of one of the humans in the place of cages.

"Well?" she asked him.

"One of the humans escaped," he said.

"I know that. But that is not why you came."

Eemanu pondered. Why had he come? He knew, but not clearly. His waking brain was still drowsy.

"I do not know, clearly," he said. "I want to ask questions. Many questions. But my brain is still asleep."

She recognized the signs. She was smart; she had to be, to teach growing simians so they could take their place in their new civilization. If they didn't, and fast, then the other animals would seize control, and that would never do.

"Think, Eemanu. Think hard. Ask anything you wish."

He thought. Mouth puckered and unconsciously, he emitted the whistling of animalism. She grimaced.

Finally he said, "I want to know why we must kill the humans."

"We do not want to kill the humans, Eemanu. But when one escapes and he cannot be caught, then we must destroy him to protect ourselves."

He had been told this time and time again, and still he didn't understand clearly.

"How can they hurt us? They are in cages."

"While they are locked up they are harmless. But if many got away they would make weapons that would kill us."

"Why?"

Her great shoulders rose and fell in a shrug. "I do not know, Eemanu. None of us knows. But, long, long ago, when the humans owned the land, they were always fighting, and killing each other. They would kill us, and the other animals, for sport. We do not want that to happen again."

Eemanu thought this over. His brain was gaining in power with increasing momentum.

"Why didn't the animals stop them?" he asked.

"They could not. They did not know

how. The humans were wise. The animals were dumb—they could not speak to each other, or to the humans. They could not read the books."

"But we can now."

"Now, yes. But it was not always so. A long, long time ago, we had to hide in the forests and live like the other animals. We knew nothing. We could do nothing whatever."

"But we can now," he reiterated.

"Yes, we can now. But only because something happened."

"What happened?"

"We are not sure, little Eemanu. For many years the humans fought with each other and flew in the sky like birds. They dropped things on one another, and their houses and cities were destroyed. Slowly the men died. Only a few were left. When they were too weak to fight any more, they had to stop. Then the animals grew smart, and they caught the men and put them in cages where many of the animals had been kept."

"I know all that. But what made us smart?"

"No one knows, yet. Some of the Old Ones have an idea. It had to do with the things the humans dropped from the skies. They would make a great noise and a great light and a cloud would rise high up that could be seen for miles and miles. A cloud that was shaped like this . . ." she bent over and picked from near a stone a small, white mushroom.

"FOR a long time after, when we went near the dead cities where the things had fallen, we would sicken. The children of the apes and of the animals were born strange.

"And their children were stranger still.

"This went on and on until one day an ape talked, and a dog understood, and between them they caught a man, and talked to him also. It was not easy. It is not easy now. But we can talk. And from that day to this we have been getting more and more clever.

"Soon we will make a new world for ourselves."

The voice fell silent. Eemanu sat in mental solitude, studying his inborn vision, reveling in his now almost totally awakened mind. Then cries in the woods broke the reverie.

A parrot flew overhead and cried down to them, "The human has just been found."

They leaped to their feet and ran into the woods toward the noise.

The escaped human had been cornered in a ruined building that had once been very large and imposing. They could see him peering from one of the large windows.

"Keep down. He has a noise stick!" warned one of the apes.

"A noise stick!" the old grey ape cried. "I thought we had found and destroyed them all."

"No. He has one. It works, too. Already he has killed three of us."

"He is dangerous. We must destroy him now!"

"Yes, but how? We cannot get inside. He will see us."

The little monkey with the newborn intelligence was staring at the structure. It seemed to him, from where he sat on a branch, that it should be very simple. He didn't realize that in him nature had taken another step forward, but in his skull was a brain far superior to any the other apes had.

He said, "Get Old Nabob. Have him push against that tree—and that one—and that one over there. They will fall against the wall. It looks very weak—perhaps it will break."

The old ape stared at him. The grey teacher explained:

"He is one of my pupils. His brain has just awakened."

"Oh!" was all the other said, but it carried a world of meaning. For he knew that here was a future leader, even though he was, as yet, rather insignificant, physically. But in this day, mental powers counted for more than muscle. There were plenty to do the back work; there were too few ready for the task of thinking and planning.

Old Nabob, descendant of a long line of circus elephants, placed his great head against the trunks and down they came. Their tops crashed against the weakened walls.

The fourth trunk thudded against the cracked facade, sending bricks pouring down.

The human saw what was happening, and he poured his deadly fire on the lumbering behemoth. Old Nabob stumbled but kept valiantly on. But finally the fire began to tell. Streaming blood from a dozen spots, his usually even temper flared past the breaking point, he launched himself bodily at the teetering wall. It was the

telling force. The crumbling structure toppled, spilling the human out onto the grass.

The showering bricks and timber missed him.

He had somehow managed to keep a grip on his weapon. Rising to one knee, he poured a scattering fire among the watching animals. None of them moved. Thinking, perhaps, that they were dead, he leaped to his feet and made off into the forest.

"After him!" screamed one of the apes. "He must not escape."

The rush began from all directions at once.

He didn't stand a chance. Overhead flew the birds. Watching them, the animals knew every move he made. Finally they trapped him again, cowering among the shattered concrete piers of what had once been a magnificent bridge.

He fired his remaining shots, then, clubbing the weapon, waited. They came at him from all sides, cautiously, slowly. Overhead crept one of the great apes, crawling along the one remaining girder. Finally he reached a vantage spot directly over the man. He lowered himself to arm's length, swung gently, then dropped.

The man screamed once as the mighty arms closed. Even then he would have escaped with his life had he submitted. But, dropping the now useless weapon, he tore at the hair, and, lowering his head, bared his teeth and tried to bite. Kicking, clawing, biting, he fought the unequal battle.

The others closed around to watch. They realized the struggle could have only one outcome, yet each seemed reluctant to give the command. It remained to the little monkey.

"He will not surrender," Eemanu cried. "Kill him quickly, and be done with the thing."

The great arms closed. For one long instant, as all creation seemed to hold its breath, the deadly tableau froze thus—then a sodden cracking and a shrill scream bespoke the finish.

They gathered around the remains, silently, albeit a trifle sadly. The cats mourned softly, then withdrew. The dogs whined a little, ancient memories of other days haunting them. The great apes shook their heads.

There followed a long unhappy silence. Then:

"We did not want to kill him," said the grey teacher, turning away. "We only wish to live in peace. But if we let humans rule the land again, only death will be the victor."

A little monkey, who, but a short time before, had carried a basket of bones to the zoo to feed the humans, listened to the fateful words, and knew they sounded the death knell of a dying race that had its chance and squandered it on the gambler's table of power and greed.

On Sale Now!

Here is what you've asked for. Uncut and unabridged, complete in one issue, two of the greatest fantasy classics of all time:

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And

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By J. U. Giesy

Here in one issue is the greatest value in fantasy reading you will find in this or any other periodical. Both of these great stories appear in the big May issue of FANTASTIC NOVELS.

(Continued from page 111)

World War would destroy every organized civilization in the world, and it would work havoc without remedy on any person who saw the merciless brutality of atomic energy on the loose. That would be one side of the wall, the side without faith or hope or even a glimmer of light. That Man can today choose for himself which side of the wall to live on, is to me proof of God's generosity.

And I conclude this note with a suggestion that other fans will probably approve and heartily endorse: Why don't you assign your best artists to conceive and draw a calendar, having twelve of the best science fiction drawings, and make same available to your readers—that's *me*—at a certain price?

RUSSELL HAROLD WOODMAN.

505A Washington Ave.,
Portland, Maine.

"CONGRATULATIONS, MR. FORESTER!"

It's been some time, I think, since I've written you folks. I haven't been busy, though—merely preoccupied. My husband is in the Navy, and when he goes to sea I'm too blue for a while to care if someone drops an A-bomb or not, or if I write letters or not.

I want especially to discuss Forester's "Peacemaker". The ending wasn't the traditional happy one, but the whole theme, though not brand new, is still refreshingly handled and sympathetically portrayed.

I'd like to state my firm belief that plot or even construction alone, cannot "make" a story. It takes sincere characterization. Many stories with very little action in the plot are memorable because the entire structure depends almost solely upon the ebb and flow, the clash and conflict, of human emotions. This holds true in any story, and at least in my case, you can throw out a thousand blood-and-thunders for one little story as human and as simple as the "Peacemaker" was.

Congratulations, Mr. Forester, from a now very interested follower of yours.

I wish to say much of the same thing about the short, "Lonesome Place", written by Derleth. I might add he truthfully pictured the way I always feel, in the "lonesome places", myself! It only goes to prove what I said before—a real human emotion, clearly and sympathetically portrayed, beats thousands of words. A story needn't be long to be good, and I wish Frances Hubaceck would take note. It isn't fair to any author to prefer novels merely because they are longer!

"Planet of Sand" seemed to belong in a science-fiction magazine. And it was a good example, I think, of lots of words—lots of action—and so little actual characterization that it was hackneyed, and left me with—nothing. I was glad to be finished with it, for it aroused no interest, no feelings, and not even a momentary thrill of curiosity. I knew how it would end—and it did—according to formula. Pardon me, Mr. Leinster, while I yawn.

Referring to the letter of Mr. Decil, in the "Viewpoints" I'd like to see if you'd consider a funny story I think is suited to your magazine. It was printed in a pocket edition booklet, as one of a group. Name of the booklet was "Out of This World", and the story I refer to is the very lovely and amusing story of "Sam Small's Tyke". Anyway, if you don't agree, and still get to read it, I feel I've done you a favor. Even if you've read it before. I feel it is a distinct classic, and deserves your consideration, anyhow.

So now—I've done my duty. I've commented—I've discussed—I've even advised. No fan could do more!

Adios, then until next time. As usual, I'll find it hard to await the new edition. But, as usual, it will be worth it. Best wishes for 1948.

GWEN CUNNINGHAM.

8519 MacArthur Blvd.,
Oakland, Calif.

F.F.M. SUGGESTIONS

Fantastic stories on "The Tarzan Theme" have usually proven popular not only with the smaller group that comprises the fantasy fan field but also with the general reading public.

I would like to suggest some titles that would be quite suitable for reprinting in F.F.M. "The Lion's Way" and its sequel "Kaspa the Lion Man" by C. T. Stoneham are excellent tales on the "boy raised by animals" theme. The manner in which Kaspa Starke is reared by the lions and his many subsequent adventures make for a thrilling tale. Another tale on this theme is "Lord of the Leopards" by F.A.M. Webster. This story is supposed to be a sound study of animal psychology as well as an excellent story about a lad who is reared as a leopard cub.

A most unique and decidedly different story along the "Prehistoric" line is "The Giant Cat" by J. H. Rosny. This book is sub-titled: "The Quest of Aoun and Zouhr". It is about the fabulous time of the Mammoth and the Great Lion of the Caves, a hundred thousand years ago when races of men, to-day extinct, may have once lived on the earth. This novel has been translated from the French.

I consider F.F.M. top fantasy magazine and now with the reappearance of *Fantastic Novels* for the purpose of reprinting the Munsey Classics of Fantasy you have really given the readers what they want.

I would like to put in another plug for the books of John Taine. His books, "Green Fire", "Quayle's Invention", "The Gold Tooth" and "The Purple Sapphire" never appeared in a magazine and are swell tales!

In the Fantasy Fan Field I am seeking to obtain such items as *The Imag.—Index, The 1940 Year Book,* both issues of Crawford's *Unusual Stories, Time Traveler, Science Fiction Digest, Fantasy Magazine,* and other older fan-zines. I also collect the works of Frederick Faust. I would be glad to hear from those who have any of the above items for sale or trade.

DARRELL C. RICHARDSON.

6 Silver Ave.,
South Fort Mitchell, Kentucky.

ASKING FOR "THE TORCH"

I have been a reader of your magazine ever since the first issue. In fact, I used to read the *Argosy* many years ago, and it was quite pleasant to read again some of the favorites of long ago. I was sorry when your policy was changed so that you would not be able to reprint stories from the magazines any more, but I have enjoyed the stories you used, anyway. Now comes the news that *Fantastic Novels* will be published again, and that it will use stories from the old Munsey publications—and that is really good news.

There was one particular story from the old *Argosy* that was always a favorite of mine, and I waited in vain for you to republish it. That story was "The Torch", by Jack Bechdolt. I saved the issues containing that story for years, but they disappeared after I had read them several times. Probably someone took them to read and just forgot to return them. But I cannot forget that yarn. I read many stories by Bechdolt, who is a master, but I belive that is the only "fantastic" he ever wrote.

You ask for requests, and this is the one yarn that no one else seems to have thought about, yet at the time it was published it was widely acclaimed as one of the best of its type to ever appear in *Argosy*. It seems strange to me that none of these new publishers have thought of it. It was published, if I am not mistaken, way back in 1919 or 1920. With illustrations by the one and only Lawrence, that would be a real attraction in *Fantastic Novels*.

WESLEY G. SMITH.

Willow Grove, Penna.

Editor's Note: I advise you to write to Oswald Train, 3507 N. Sydenham St., Philadelphia 40, Penna., concerning a new book edition of "The Torch."

"BOOKOLLECTORS"

I have for sale or trade a number of fantasy, science fiction, and weird books, some second hand but the following all in brand new condition:

"The Lost Cavern" by H. F. Heard, "The Book of Ptath" and also "The World of A" by A. E. van Vogt, "The Black Flame" by Weinbaum, "The Black Wheel" by Merritt, "Dark Carnival" by Ray Bradbury, "The Forbidden Garden" by John Taine, "A Treasury of Science Fiction" (30 collected classics), "Prince of Darkness" (a demonthology), "Many Dimensions" by Chas. Williams, "Holy Terrors" by Arthur Machen, "The Torch" by Jack Bechdolt, and "Final Blackout" by L. Ron Hubbard. Also, an invaluable adjunct for the fantasy bibliophile, "The Checklist of Fantastic Literature" (over 5000 titles).

Also have back issues of F.F.M. and F.N., *Weird Tales, Marvel Tales, Strange Tales, Fantasy Book, Futuristic Stories, Ghost Stories, Miracle Stories, Unknown, New Worlds, etc.* Please accompany inquiries with stamped-addressed envelope.

FORREST J ACKERMAN.

236-½ N. New Hampshire,
Hollywood 4, Cal.

OFFER FROM N. Z.

I have just finished reading Dec. F.F.M. which I enjoyed very much indeed, especially "Atlantis' Exile". If you keep on printing this type and quality of story you'll never look back. Warwick Deeping's story was excellent, too.

Your Readers' Viewpoint in my opinion is the best feature in all of the S.F. magazines. Its value to collectors of various magazines alone is worth the price of the magazine, as your broadminded policy of letting readers state what magazines they wish to buy or sell or exchange is a great help to all. Keep it up. If I lived in the U.S.A. I'd have completed my files of magazines long ago, but being so far away, by the time I answer any letters in your columns, the magazines offered are usually gone.

Below, is a list of my most urgent wants, and in exchange for any of them I can offer besides an assortment of various S.F. and Fantastic magazines over the last few years, almost all the old Munsey, *Argosy* and *Argosy All Story Weekly* for the years 1919, 1920, 1921 and a few later issues. Most of them are in new condition.

If any of your readers are stamp collectors, I can offer them in exchange for magazines mint or used copies of most of the stamp issues in this part of the world also.

Magazines wanted are: *Amazing* 1926, April, July; *Astounding* 1940, Oct., 1941, Feb., 1943; *Wonder* 1941 Aug.; *Fantastic Adventures* 1940, March; *Planet* Vol. 1. Nos. 6 & 7; *Stirring Science* 1941; April, June, 1942 March; *Cosmic* 1941, May; *Marvel* 1941, April; *Science Fiction Quarterly* Nos. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 10; *Capt. Future* 1940 Fall, 1941 Winter, 1942 Winter; *Future Fiction* 1940 Aug.; *Future Combined with Science F.* 1942 June; *Super Science* 1942 June, 1941 Jan., March, May, Aug., Nov.; *Weird* 1941 March, 1940 March, May, Sept. 1939 Sept., Nov., 1937 Nov. Dec., 1936 Jan., Feb., March, June, July, Aug., Nov. and any earlier than 1936. *Canadian Super Science* 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13.

I also have following books to offer for magazines. Lovecraft's "Marginalia", Haggard's "She" and "She & Allan", John Beynon's "Planet Plane", and Booklet "Stratosphere Patrol" by Vol Molesworth.

J. R. MURTAGH.

509 Selwood Rd.,
Hastings, New Zealand.

LIKED DERLETH AND LEINSTER

Thank you very much for publishing my harsh letter which appeared in F.F.M. Feb. 1948. I won't write any more harsh sayings, if you get rid of this present policy of yours. Inject some new ideas that really could sell your circulations.

For instance, why don't you give present day writers and authors a big chance? I am sure they will make it big.

"Planet of Sand" by Leinster and "The Lonesome Place" by Derleth are really the bright stories of Feb. issue. Every paragraph of "Planet of Sand" is packed with mysteries and every line is packed with action and every page

a masterpiece. As for "Lonesome Place", I would say that the story is an awful lot better than the so-called leading story "The Peacemaker".

The illustrations are perfect on page 90 and 91, as well as page 115. As for the others, oh, the drawings are all right, but it contains depressing atmosphere, the drawings even tell a story completely, without one's bothering to read "The Peacemaker".

I have missed Hannes Bok very badly in this issue. He is a number one artist for all time. In the old days, he appeared in second place, because Virgil Finlay reigned supreme at that time with his excellent drawings. Oh, Finlay is still good on covers, today, but inside pictures are not up to par.

I have really enjoyed The Readers' Viewpoint department. Especially the mild feud between Derleth and Moskowitz with William H. D. Bence clinching the verdict. I agree with Stirling Macoboy on Whitley's "Boomerang" concerning the use of language. I know Australians never talk like that.

I am fairly successful about disposing of half of my back issue collections, but I still have some few in excellent condition, *Wonder, Amazing, Future* and others. If anyone wishes to trade with me, I would like to get seven missing copies of early F.F.M. and other odd copies. Incidentally, although I am not so sure, I will probably get five 1942 F.F.M. copies through misdeal. If it does come, I am planning to trade or sell.

GORDON RIX.

131 Leila Ave.,
N. Kildonan,
Manitoba, Canada.

HERE'S "DECIL" AGAIN

The Finlay femme on the April cover is more that faintly reminiscent of the females he used to turn out in '42. I guess the cover is supposed to illustrate Dorothy on her way back with the white dove of peace at her side to stop Mr. Pethwick from doing any more damage. Although, in the story, the darling never went around in that sort of attire.

If not, what did it illustrate? Anyway, it was an adequate cover; not outstanding, not bad, but adequate.

There's going to be quite a bit of comment concerning "Peacemaker." I'll say that it was a very interesting study in the psychology of Mr. Pethwick, though the theme of a worm emerging from its shell has been handled a bit more realistically. It's a matter of controversy whether a person with Pethwick's phychological background would have acted the way he did. All of which gives me an idea for a poll. Reader, if *U* think Mr. Pethwick would have acted the same in real life, as Forester pictured him, drop me a card saying so; if not, drop me a card saying no. I'll give F.F.M. the results after a suitable interval of time. Interesting, huh?

As long as we're still dwelling on novels, leave me scream some more. I say, old chappie, don't U think it's about time to swing into some American authors? The subtle little differences between the British outlook and the American outlook seems to jar the enjoyment of a British tale. Last time I wrote, I suggested a humorous novel, and believe it or not, I've received letters agreeing with me. Why don't U have L. Sprague DeCamp do one of his specialties; Finlay-illustrated with a Lawrence cover? M-m-m!

Of coure for every new reader U'd prob'ly lose two of the "I want to be scared to death" type, but still it would be interesting to try it. All-Fiction couldn't go broke on just one issue!

Derleth should always be read by candlelight at the stroke of midnite, and his last contribution was no exception. 'Twuz nice if U like that sort of stuff.

Don't U just hate people like me who think magazines are published for their own private enjoyment? I do too!

Leinster wuz too melodramatic. He's written better.

Quite naturally, page 23 had the best illustration. Lawrence's illustrations suffered by too much shading, but he's done much worse. He's a bit better on covers, but Finlay *must* do a cover to keep the fen happy—me too.

To QSY back to the readers section of this and/or several other issues, we find that some readers are very intolerant. Just because They don't approve of a certain branch of fiction they immediately brand it as inferior to other types. All fiction has its strong or weak points—or does it?

Now it's time for a commercial. Since F.F.M. allowed my blurb to slip into its letter-section (They should know better, but thanx U charming people. Make the same mistake twice.) I've received many requests for back issues. I've sold loads, so if U collectors find that serial isn't complete, or that U are missing an issue from your stf collection, drop me a card or letter. (Some people were even considerate enough to enclose self-addressed, stamped envelopes, for which I say "Great!") Also, if anybody would care to cuss or discuss music and records, 'twould be nice. Then, too, if there are any OM's or YL's in the crowd, QSL for a QSO.

Y'know, if as many people respond to this letter as they did to the last one, I'll be forced to give U a commission by subscribing to F.F.M.

Decilishly,

DECIL.

170 "C" St., Apt. No. 2,
Upland, Calif.

P. S. The above wuz for the readers only. As for U, editor; *pleez* steer away from British authors, and give us something to sink our wisdom teeth into. Serously, D.

POLL OF "WANTED STORIES"

My success in getting letters published in F.F.M. must have gone to my head; now I find that it is a physical impossibility to let an issue go by without an epistle. Oh, well. I can stand it if you can.

The Feb. cover was a great improvement over last issue's, but there's lots of room for im-

provement. I don't think either Finlay or Lawrence have been doing their best work for F.F.M. of late, though the illos are still very good. I wish you could have more illos, though.

"The Peacemaker" was good, but rather pointless; typical of hard-cover fantasy. "Planet of Sand" was pure space-opera, but not bad at all. "The Lonesome Place" wasn't worthy of Derleth.

I was sorry to see that the letter column had been cut to half its length in the preceding issue, but it was still interesting. I still wish you'd answer each one briefly, though. But I suppose we can forgive all these shortcomings in our rejoicing over the return of *Fantastic Novels* and the Munsey classics.

I've taken a poll of all the stories requested in the year 1947, and here are those who got two or more requests. Though you will notice that there were not too many individual Haggard stories asked for, at least thirty readers said they would like to see all Haggard's fantasies, and the majority of these were particularly in favor of the complete Allan Quatermain series, at least those which are fantastic enough to find a place in your magazine. And, dear editress, let me add my plea for all "Taduki" stories you haven't as yet printed. Anyway, here are the results, as compiled by that arch-poll-cat, Dan Mulcahy.

Chambers—Slayer of Souls 2, Maker of Moons 2 . . . Haggard—She 3, Ayesha 5 . . . Taine—Gold Tooth 2, Green Fire 2, Purple Sapphire 3 . . . O'Neill—Land Under England 2, Wright—World Below 2. And that's that. There were numerous requests for stories, but few were seconded; then too, some fans only asked for authors, not naming any stories. The new-story writers requested were Henry Kuttner and spouse (C. L. Moore) and Ray Bradbury. Of these the highest ranking was C. L. Moore. Some readers asked that Kuttner be allowed to do a complete original novel for you. I second that motion! Some asked that Burroughs do an original for you. I second that motion too, providing it's a Mars, Venus or Pellucidar novel.

I'd like to hear from any fans who'd like to discuss science-fiction and fantasy. My favorite "classical" writers are Lovecraft, Haggard, Weinbaum, Giesy, and Cummings. My favorite current writers are Kuttner, Moore, Bradbury, Sturgeon, Burroughs, Binder, and Hamilton.

Scientifictionally yours,

DAN MULCAHY.

4170 Utah St.,
St. Louis, Mo.

LIKES NEIL AUSTIN JOB

Nice yarn you had for the lead-off in the February issue, or so I thought, until I got to the end. . . . Y'know, somehow, I never can get used to novels like "The Peacemaker", where the hero croaks in the end, although otherwise it was very good.

"Planet of Sand" was another space-opera, just that. It was, though, a darned good one for these hackneyed times, where 'most everything a fella reads in STF is either Space-opera or Time Travel. Don't get me wrong, tho'; I've nothing against these 2 themes, in their place, and if well handled. It is too seldom, tho', that they are well-written, and I think a good many of my fellow sufferers-in-silence will agree. "The Lonesome Place" by the *meister-schreiber—master-writer*—Derleth was not bad, but could well have been done better by, especially from the pen of the publisher of so many top-notchers, and writer of many more. It left me slightly disappointed, not to find a real ghoul, or at least a derogatory spook or two, lurking in the offing, and entering the plot. It seemed to be out of place in F.F.M., though I'd like many more of that type. I meant, simply, that I'd look more for such tales of horror in a competitor mag but am darned glad to see it in *our* mag.

Your interior illustrations were good, for which give Lawrence a raise, *except* (here it comes, now) that one fom "Planet of Sand." For that story a scene showing the hero getting his sled free of the *Stallifer*, or burrowing down to the *Erebus* would have gone better down my palate. Any opinions for or against it from anyone else?

I'd like to see less British, and more American fiction in F.F.M., as I agree with the others in their deprecation of furrin dry stuff in the U.S. mags, with slow, draggy styles, and unfamiliar locales for the present-day-setting type of novel.

Say, just who the dickens is the nearly unclad fem on the cover supposed to represent? Not Mary Pethwick, surely, or Dorothy Laxton! Oh, well, I guess I'll just have to explain it away with the word, (ugh!) "symbolism." Ditto, I'm afraid, for the excellent pics on pp. 23, 41, 57; and since when does that masterpiece on 71 jibe with the Prof's end? I thought he was purposely roughed up, not a victim of mob unrest by accident. Oh, well, Finlay and Lawrence are still tops, in my estimation.

"Masters of Fantasy" is one thing I'll never want to see F.F.M. without, now that you've got it going so well. And Neil Austin does a good job at it, too. If there are among your readers any gun lovers in this part of Florida, I'd appreciate it if they'd write to me, as I'd like to know about joining a rifle or pistol club, as I'm new here, and don't know of any there may possibly be in this region.

PFC EVERETT ALLEN.
Co. A, 211th Inf., Fla. Nat'l G'd.,
1735 N.W. 1st St.,
Miami 35, Florida.

AUSTRALIAN COMPLIMENTS LAWRENCE

As you know, it has been impossible to obtain copies of your magazine here in Australia since the ban was imposed by the Government on American pulp magazines in May, 1940. Occasional copies have been sent "down under" by generous American fans, and so *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* still has a following in this country.

I am writing this letter for two reasons. The first is to comment favorably on the novel contained in the June 1946 issue of F.F.M. "The Undying Monster," by Jessie Kerruish. It is by

far the most entertaining and the most *plausible* werewolf story I have yet read. Each of the characterisations was finely drawn, and the mental evolution of Oliver would stand alongside the contortions in the mind of Hamlet. May I, belatedly, congratulate you on publishing such a fine novel?

The illustrations by Lawrence are now inseparable from the narrative. It is indeed pleasant to observe the work of an artist who obviously *studies* an author's work before he attempts to illustrate scenes from it. Some of the illustrations in some science-fiction magazines suggest that the stories were written around a drawing!

My second reason for writing this letter is that I wish to seek the privilege of airing an item of news through your readers' columns to the many people who are fortunate enough to read F.F.M. regularly.

Eight years ago, before our supply of American science fiction and fantasy magazines was abruptly cut off, a number of fans here in Australia formed a club—The Futurian Society of Sydney. During the war, as members enlisted for combat or went into munitions, we were forced to hibernate, but five months ago, the Futurian Society was revived. It was felt that although no American stf magazines were coming into Australia, the attitude of mind that reading fantasy created, still persisted, and the members still wished to meet and discuss fantasy, looking forward to the day when American magazines would again come to this country.

The Futurian Society now (29/12/47) has fifteen members, and spreads its membership from Sydney northward to Newcastle and Coolangatta, southward to Melbourne, and across the water to Tasmania, England, and Kure (Japan). It is publishing a monthly fan magazine, "The Sydney Futurian," which will shortly see its fifth issue. It is building a library of old fantasy magazines and books so that members will not be completely deprived of their favorite reading matter.

As secretary of the Futurian Society, I am writing this letter in the hope that you may be good enough to print it in a forthcoming issue of F.F.M., and that perhaps some of your many readers might have a few spare copies which they might post to me down here in Australia.

As there is very little stf published here, I cannot promise to send them much in exchange, but I would be glad to send them any fan magazines published down here, and Australian stamps, general literature, or whatever they might be interested in.

I suppose it is unusual for a person to write to the readers' section of a fantasy magazine and not offer comments on the previous issue, but unfortunately issues of F.F.M. are so few and far between in Australia that it is impossible for me to do so.

I would be delighted to receive a copy from one of your readers of the particular issue in which this letter is printed.

If any of your readers would care to write to me, I suggest they use the 10c airletters. These reach Australia in less than a week, whereas ordinary mail takes more than a month.

I will conclude now, wishing F.F.M., its authors, artists, readers—and editors—a fantastic year in 1948.

VOL MOLESWORTH.

Secretary, The Futurian Society,
160 Beach St.,
Coogee, Sydney,
Australia.

WANTS HELP

I have just read my first copy of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and immediately wondered how long I had been depriving myself of this publication. C. S. Forester's "The Peacemaker" (Feb. 1948) was the invitation I needed. Now I'm here to stay. The creator of Horatio Hornblower quite accidentally (and happily for me) brought me into contact with my preference in fiction. I also see by the letters published in The Readers' Viewpoint that quite a few followers of H. Rider Haggard are also in attendance. Just like home!

It seems that I have missed a considerable amount of reading pleasure for the last several years according to the enthusiastic praise of your readers. If future copies provide the interest that my first copy has brought to me, it will be like getting Christmas presents six times a year instead of just in December.

I am very interested in hearing from the H. Rider Haggard fans among you readers, as I'm having difficulty locating a good many of the books by this author and I can stand a little help in this direction. If anyone knows of copies of his works that are available, I certainly would appreciate it. I am particularly anxious to get "When The Earth Shook", "World's Desire", "Ghost Kings", (also called "Lady of the Heavens"), "Thebes and the Hundred Gates". I can reciprocate with some titles, either by trade or sale, such as: "She", "Allan Quatermain", "She and Allan", "Montezuma's Daughter", "King Solomon's Mines", "The Ivory Child", "Moon of Israel", "Virgin of the Sun", or "Marie."

KARL H. SHARP.

621 Kirtland St.,
Pittsburgh 8, Pa.

STARTING NEW FAN CLUB

It was with great joy that I found and bought the Feb. '48 F.F.M. from my favorite newsstand yesterday. A very nice Christmas present, albeit a little late.

Now to the stories. They were all good this issue. The novel—the slight bit of preaching in "The Peacemaker" strengthens the story rather than weakens. The end was one that I will remember for a long time. The story illustrates perhaps as well as several textbooks the stupidity and viciousness of human beings in the mass.

Leinster's short was smoothly written, almost standard space opera, but still with enough minor twists to carry it through to a very readable and enjoyable story.

Derleth's weird was nicely done. Nothing out of the ordinary.

Your artwork is still good. Cover, standard postwar Finlay.

The Lawrence interiors are o.k., nothing outstanding for Lawrence, but still better than the pulp average.

I am attempting to organize a Milwaukee Science Fantasy Society. No dues. Lots and lots of advantages. Principally those of borrowing from my fantasy collection and news of new books and magazines. As I am co-editor of the principle new magazine of SF-Fandom, I get all of the book news, etc.

BOB STEIN.

514 W. Vienna Ave.,
Milwaukee Science Fantasy Society,
Milwaukee 12, Wisconsin.

F.F.M. IDEAL MAGAZINE

I discovered your most interesting magazine F.F.M. about two years ago, and the more I read, the more I want to read. I would appreciate it very much if readers could help me complete my collection of F.F.M. and *Fantastic Novels*. I'm willing to buy or trade with books by Jack London, Haggard, Anthologies of weird, fantastic and supernatural tales, etc. or stamps. I want the 5 issues of *Fantastic Novels* and the following of F.F.M.

1939 Nov. and Dec., 1940 All 12 months, 1941 April, June, August, 1942 April, June, July, August, Sept., Oct., Dec., 1943 March, Sept., Dec., 1944 March, Dec., 1945 Sept., Dec., 1946 Dec., 1947 Feb., June.

I have the following duplicate copies to trade of F.F.M., Feb. 1946, June 1946, Oct. 1946, April 1947, and April 1946.

F.F.M. is the ideal magazine for youngsters as well as adults who are not too old for adventure in their hearts It gives wings to the imagination, is wholesome and well written. I boost it wherever I go and I can assure you that F.F.M. has quite a following in South Africa.

H. UYS.

P. O. Box 2603,
Cape Town, South Africa.

WANTS TO TRADE

I have been reading F.F.M. since the very first issue. The majority of stories I have enjoyed immensely. The last three issues were particularly good. "Minimum Man", "The Man Who Went Back" and "The Peacemaker".

Some readers gripe about the illustrations or trimmed edges on the magazine. What in the world difference do these things make? It's the story that counts!

I'm making a collection of Edgar Rice Burroughs novels. I wonder if your readers could help me complete it? I need about 11 books, mostly of his lesser known works. Such as "The Cave Girl", "Bandit of Hell's Bend", etc.

I have a number of books and back date magazines to trade.

WILLIAM MEDINE.

2859 N. Stillman St.,
Philadelphia 32, Pa.

A TOAST TO A. DERLETH

I'm a new reader of F.F.M. (my first copy contained "Ancient Allan"), and I thought I'd better sit down and write a nice long letter to you to let you know how much I enjoy your fine magazine.

First of all I'd better tell you how I feel about your latest offering. 1—"The Peacemaker"—This was something different. Even if I do dislike stf I'll have to take my hat off to C. S. Forester for a fine tale. Dr. Pethwick certainly had a terribly wicked time of it. And who would guess that he could have stood up under his wife's ruthless abuse all that time? Br-r! What a woman! 2—"Planet of Sand"—Here's some more stf. Didn't go so well with me. 3—"The Lonesome Place"—Boyohboyohboy! A. Derleth really batted out 1,000 on that story. Here's a toast to you for printing it and to Mr. Derleth for writing it. 4—The cover—I suppose that gentleman of the furrowed brow is Edward. And does that luscious half-clad young girl stand for world peace through disarmament? Pretty realistic-looking traffic accident at the bottom of the picture, too. 5—Inside illustrations—they were all good. I especially liked the ones on pages 23 and 71. The former haunts one. That is the impression it gave me. It shows, I suppose, people torn and homeless from war trying to reopen the door to prosperity and happiness. The latter portrays the terrible fury which fills those who have fallen on the Peacemaker and which is evident in the contorted faces. 6—Readers' Viewpoint—this is the finest of readers' letter sections ever printed in any magazine. You deserve a lot of credit for this. Every copy of F.F.M. I buy, the Readers' Viewpoint is the first part I turn to. It's refreshing to learn what other fantasy fans are thinking and talking about. 7—Masters of Fantasy—oh, ecstasy. At last I'll have a good collection of all my favorite authors' portraits. Joy to the Nth degree!

Somebody said something about having stf novels in the magazine. Isn't it time we had something besides that and adventure yarns? I'm not trying to appear sour, because I'm really all out for F.F.M. Gee whiz! It is far above my poor power to judge you, but all those stfanatics and adventurites *should* be well satisfied with the recent novels which F.F.M. has featured ("People of the Ruins", "Unthinkable", "25th Hour" and "Before the Dawn"). Of course, I guess I haven't got too much to gripe about, because there have been some awfully good fantasy stories presented in this magazine, such as "The Star Rover", "Allan and the Ice-Gods", "Minimum Man" and "The Undying Monster". Even then, however, practically all of it is based on "end-of-civilization", "prehistoric" and "lost race" themes.

Everyone else writes in about the stories they'd like to see in F.F.M. so-o-o, why should *I* be different? How about something by Lovecraft? Surely he must have written something which hasn't appeared in magazine form. Why not print "At the Mountains of Madness" or "Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath"? Get something more by Haggard; perhaps "Wis-

dom's Daughter", "King Solomon's Mines" or "Allan Quatermain". Robert W. Chambers is a possible candidate for these hallowed pages, also. His "Slayer of Souls" is an excellent piece of fantasy. How about more from Dunsany, Machen, Blackwood, C. A. Smith, A. Merritt, H. G. Wells, Hodgson, R. E. Howard, Frank B. Long and G. A. England? Speaking of G. A. England, his "The Thing from Outside" is something you ought to think about if you haven't printed it already Take some more from E. F. Benson's "Visible and Invisible", also.

Hey, fellow fans of fantasy! How about you and me getting together on a little trading? I've got F.F.M.—Vol. 9 No. 1—"City of Wonder"; F.F.M.—Vol. 9 No. 3—"The Peacemaker"; *Weird Tales* Vol. 39 No. 12, Vol. 40 No. 1, Vol. 40 No. 2, Vol. 40 No. 3; "Ship of Ishtar" by Merritt (Avon); "The Uninvited" by Dorothy Macardle (pocketbook); *Astounding Science Fiction*—Vol. 40 No. 1 and one copy of "Best Supernatural Stories of H.P. Lovecraft" (book). All of them are in good shape. I'll swap them for either one copy each of "Dracula" and "Frankenstein" in book form and one copy of "The Man Who Was Thursday" (F.F.M.) all in good shape, or one copy of "Phra the Phoenician" (F.F.M.) and one copy each of "The Lurking Fear", "The Dreams in the Witch-House", "The Horror at Red Hook" and "The Strange High House in the Mist" all by Lovecraft and in good shape.

Oh, yes. I have heard so much praise concerning your companion magazine, *Fantastic Novels*, that I wanted to see what it was like. Imagine how amazed and satisfied I was to find that you have resumed its existence and that it is all that I expected it to be. Please keep it going, and thanks a lot.

That's all from this end of the line, so if you aren't yawning for the fourth time, I'll just quietly slip away. . . .

A satisfied FANtastic,

GARY WALKUP.

Route No. 1,
Spokane 16, Wash.

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Veterans' Home,
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"MASTER OF FANTASY—GREAT!"

I suppose at one time on another nearly all your readers have their complaints, wishes, suggestions and so forth, answered by your magazine, if not in whole, then in part.

I refer, of course, to the deplorable depths your short story standard sank to, the many repercussions from the readers, myself included, and then the heights F.F.M's short stories attained in the Feb. issue. August Derleth can write tales of a high grade when he is mindful of leaving behind the hackneyed plots he all too often uses. And Murray Leinster conveys the very essence of man's struggle against the inexplicable, from Earth to the remoteness of outer space. There may be others in S.F. as good as Leinster but none better.

Concerning "Masters of Fantasy" I have but one thing to say—great! I always try to link Neil Austin's drawing conceptions of the author's work with the title, but I find that the mouse and the hour glass in the one featuring S. Fowler Wright eludes me. Won't someone tell me which book it stands for? Some day, perhaps, F.F.M. may see fit to print his "The World Below", and on that day "The Ark of Fire" may come down to second place.

C. S. Forester's "The Peacemaker," while it didn't ring any of the proverbial bells, was a good story; however, only Mr. Forester's ability to successfully portray his characters and move them true to form, saved the story. I wonder why the author, with a chance to create a classic of fantasy, passed it up to expound his political views and make of it something to be sold at the common book stand. The more I think of what it could have been, the madder I get. Anyway, Lawrence was way up there with his interior illustrations, though Finlay's cover, one of his worst, should grace a comic magazine. That female sure wouldn't draw any beauty prizes, either.

There were several things in the "Viewpoints" I want to comment on, the first being the results of J. J. Stamp's "Since '46 poll". I was amazed and no doubt you, the editor, were also, that "Before The Dawn" drew only one vote! Looks to me like a lot of very new readers took part in it. Personally I would like to see another such poll conducted with every one participating (me too) beginning with "Ark of Fire", I bet the outcome would be far different. "People of the Ruins"—52! Who are those 52 misguided, amateurish people?

And to Thos. H. Casidy wherein he stated, "Certainly the author showed courage and originality in killing of his hero . . ." Reader Casidy, where have you been? F.F.M. has been doing that for years; in fact, they have acquired quite a unique reputation for it. Hardy is the hero, indeed, who weathers F.F.M. and comes out on his own feet. Most of them have to be carried out. Except Belshazzar. They left him.

Dan Mulcahy. Who was the loyal reader that has been reading F.F.M. since 1936? If he has, I've missed something. I like your idea of "M. of Fantasy" in a portfolio, but for F.F.M. to print "Ayesha" without "She" would leave a lot of readers out in the cold. I think "She and Allan" woud be better. There you would have two famous characters, not just one.

I agree with Tony Raines about the high prices people are asking for fantasy books; not only that but some of these same people will sell a book that is still in print at out of print prices! Anyway, I can pretend I don't notice them. I have "The King in Yellow", Merritt's "Dwellers in the Mirage" and "Moon Pool" in my collection, and, to echo Mr. Raines' immortal challenge, "Just try and get them. Hah!"

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

Well, Editor, I still dream of "Ark of Fire" and "Iron Star" days. Keep up the short story standard.

Fan-atically yours,
PHILIP GRAY

1539 W. Harrison St.,
Chicago 7, Ill.

F.F.M. BY FAR THE BEST

Apparently the traditional opening is: This is my first letter to an editor, etc.—and, oddly enough, it it. First of all, let me say that I believe that your magazine is by far one of the best in the field—i.e. the genre of the fantastic, scientific fiction with a twist, weird, macabre, complete with bops, groans, screams and eldritch, unspeakable entities.

Have read and kept your magazine for but two years, but in that time have formed some opinions that I would like to pass on plus the omnipresent plea and plug.

Opinion: Excellent in its chosen field. (Perhaps because it it the only magazine in the field doing and announcing it will attempt to do exactly what it does.) Perhaps too much emphasis on the British, not that they haven't turned out some nice pieces, but the trouble is that they have also ground out some rather uninspired hack work. F.F.M. is performing a service of definite value both to the bibliophile —the true collector in the field—and the person who purchases the magazine because of the technicolor cover, and to be regaled with escape literature of the highest, esoteric order.

Plea: Have the following duplicates I'd like to trade for runs of F.F.M., *Unknown, Weird, Horror, Terror* etc. etc. Just make an offer. I'll answer. But please give me years, numbers, condition and offer, and I'll write, with condition etc. of my things. Incidentally, I have a collection of approx 4,000 items of witchcraft, occult and fantastic fiction.

Please send stamped, self addressed envelope, for list.

WILLIAM VALRICK

P.O. Box 631,
Alamosa, Colo.

ABOUT W. H. HODGSON

To me, at least, one of the greatest stories you have published in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* is the "The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*" by William Hope Hodgson. Hodgson has been little read by fantasty fans; probably because his books were not attainable at a reasonable price and only collectors were able to secure them. Perhaps he would have been forgotten except for Mr. H. C. Koenig, who, I understand, has been campaigning for his recognition for ten years.

The "Glen Carrig" is expertly constructed and is exceeded in my opinion only by his very long novel, "The Night Land," which is much to long for F.F.M.

The poorest of Hodgson's novels is the "Ghost Pirates".

"The House on the Borderland", which is

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1148 W. Chicago Ave. Chicago 22, Ill.

regarded H.P. Lovecraft as his greatest work, tells of a house in Ireland haunted by "weird monstrosities emerging from an abyss beneath the house."

It also gives us a vision of the destruction of the solar system.

I regret that I have been unable to read more than two of Hodgson's short stories ("The Derelict" and "The Voice in the Night".)

He is indeed the "Master of the Weird and Fantastic."

RICHARD McLELLAN.

2924 No. 58th St.
Omaha 4, Nebr.

Editor's Note: F.F.M. is indebted to Mr. Koenig for first having urged the republishing of the Hodgson stories, and for loaning us his rare copies of the books, to enable us to present the stories.

ON FANTASY FILMS

Enclosed please find money order for $1.50 to renew my subscription to F.F.M.

Occasionally in the Readers'.Viewpoint there are comments concerning fantasy and science-fiction in motion pictures. These bits of information and opinions are particularly interesting to me. Although I am an avid reader of fantasy literature, my first love is in the field of fantasy films. At present I am compiling a list of amateur and professional motion pictures dealing with fantasy. It is interesting to note that the very beginning of motion pictures grew with fantasy and science-fiction stories.

In 1902 the Frenchman, George Melies, produced what is probably the first science- fiction motion picture. It is called "A Trip to the Moon" and shows the space ship leaving Earth, its arrival on the satellite, and the explorers' discovery and clashes with the moon's inhabitants. George Melies filmed innumerable fantasies before most of F.F.M.'s readers were born.

Twenty-six years before the screen adaptation of H.G. Wells' "Things to Come" was released in the U.S., the British-filmed "Battle in the Clouds" which was a prediction of aircraft as engines of destruction. "Life in the Next Century" was a French film, vintage 1910, forecasting life for our descendants in the year 2001 A.D. Fantasy in the realm of mythology was well explored. In 1908 Edison produced "The Leprechawn", a story of fairy gold. The French turned out "Legend of Orpheus" in 1909 and "Hercules and the Big Stick" in 1910 as well as many other stories dealing with Greek and Egyptian mythology.

Just about everything but the atomic bomb was put on film before the First World War. 1906 saw the world of dreams explored in "Dream of a Rarebit Fiend", an epic made by Edison in nine days at a cost of $350!

Satan was a popular subject. The French in 1908 made "The Saloon-Keeper's Nightmare", showing the devil's pranks. Goethe's "Faust" was photographed countless times. The day of the caveman was not neglected either. A delightful little French movie of

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

1908 called "Prehistoric Man" tells the story of an artist who sketches a drawing of prehistoric man that comes to life. Frightened, the artist promptly draws a prehistoric monster that also comes to life and swallows the prehistoric man! Time travel, fantastic inventions, and scientists and ghosts were all favorite subjects for motion pictures.

Aside from looking at and talking about pictures, I and a group of film addicts have been producing 16mm pictures ourselves. Our first fantasy film, "Mars" is a 16 minute picture. Mood and atmosphere of a dead world is presented with an all music sound track of Rachmaninoff's "Isle Of the Dead". Other scripts ready to be filmed are "Watchung Ridge" (written under the influence of A. Blackwood's "The Willows"), an untitled affair concerning the fate of a space ship's crew lost on the moon, and "Wanderers", an educational short subject on the planets.

Well, all this leads up to an invitation for fantasy fans interested in motion pictures to write. Information in regard to imaginative movies of today and yesterday will be appreciated. I also collect "stills" from these films. Swaps and suggestions would be welcome. I have December 1937 and Feb. 1938 *Amazing Stories* for anyone willing to part with any 1943 or 1939 issues of F.F.M.

REGINALD McMAHON.

170 President St.,
Passaic, N.J.

LOVECRAFT COLLECTOR

I am actively searching for additions to my collection of the writings of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, and articles about him and his work.

Seeking possible contacts with other HPL enthusiasts, I picked up a copy of F.F.M. the other day. My interest in science-fantasy has been dormant for 15 or 20 years; that long ago, I gathered a beautiful run of the old *Amazing Stories* (those big-page issues) that I afterwards sold at what I now realize was a murderous figure (for me, not for the dealer who got them). Since tasting the enthusiasm in your readers' letters, I could wish I had that file back.

But I am just going to keep concentrating on my Lovecraft collection. The purpose of this letter is to invite any of your readers who have HPL material to sell, to write me full descriptions with details of condition and prices. I particularly need amateur journal appearances of HPL's work, also ephemera and authentic association items.

I don't suppose I need to say that I'll be buying F.F.M. from now on; you know I'm hooked.

RAY H. ZORN.

Troy Grove,
Illinois.

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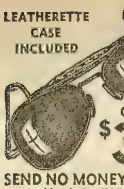

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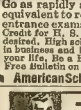

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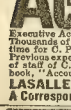

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RALPH GLISSON.

542 Prescott Road,
Merion, Penn.

SWAP OFFER

I have, after an exhaustive, extensive, elaborate search, finally completed my sets of F.F.M. and F.N. and find that gold on Saturn is almost as easy to procure. What a task! A bit of good news, however, for fellow readers, I obtained in my search an almost complete duplicate set (for I originally planned on cutting out and binding according to author—a plan I have now changed to incorporate six issues in one binding, complete.) Also still have access to most of Burroughs' out of print books all of which I am willing to sell or trade. Am interested in good cloth bound Fantasy fiction, I particularly want O. A. Kline's "Prince of Peril", Swordsman of Mars", "Outlaws of Mars", "Buccaneers of Venus," Cummings' works, Balmer & Wylie's "When Worlds Collide," in the order named. Make offer.

If I were a French general, I would pin a medal on you, click my heels and kiss you on both cheeks for your returning F.N. to the fold. Ah! At long last! I finally complete my Merritt set with "The Ship of Ishtar," *illustrated!* Keep up the good work.

I hope you can publish this letter in the Readers' Viewpoint as I may be able to help a poor struggling soul looking, as I did, for back issues of F.F.M. and F.N.

E. J. FROST.

4941 W. Melrose St.,
Chicago 41, Ill.

FEB. ISSUE VERY GOOD

I just finished the Feb. issue of F.F.M. and I must say it's very good. For a while you were publishing only fair, and sometimes very easily obtainable novels.

However, for once I have nothing to complain about. "Planet of Sand" was especially good. However, instead of only having a space story short, why not have a novel with an inter-stellar background?

I also suggest that you reprint some of Stapledon's works. I will not suggest that you reprint "Starmaker" or his more easily obtainable novels "Sirius", "Odd Folks", "The Flames" or "Lost and First Men". However. why don't you reprint "Lost Men in London", "Old Man in New World", "Darkness and The Light", or some of his other works? These are hard to find, and expensive to buy if and when found. Also I notice that you haven't given us any of Dunsany's stories for some time. I wish you would. I will leave to your own good taste the choice of artist who would illustrate it. Personally I would pick Lawrence as the best artist for a Dunsany story.

I did not start this letter to sell a few books.

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

However, I might mention that I have a variant edition of "Fox Woman" and Thorne Smith's "Dream's End", that I will sell or trade for very old magazines, especially some *Weirds* or *Astoundings*. Anyone who wants them may make his own offer of either cash or trade. I am open for an offer for other old magazines than the ones I mentioned.

MARK WALSTED.

Route No. 3,
Albany, Oregon.

CANADIAN SAD STORY

We Canadian fans are certainly way down in the dumps, owing to the recent ban put on all pulp magazines and similar publications published in the U.S.A.

Imagine my disappointment on barging into my favorite news store and hearing the proprietor inform me that your wonderful magazine would no longer grace his shelves, and that no subsciptions would be accepted!

What to do? Easiest and practically the only solution as far as I can figure out, would be to depend on the kindness and unselfishness of your countrymen, namely, such ardent fans as Joe Kennedy, Chad Oliver, J. T. Oliver, R. I. Martini, Rex E. Ward, etc, etc.

Thinking over this, I have decided to give it a try. Perhaps in the very near future said ban will be lifted, but until this does happen many a twenty-five cent postal order will be mailed to some understanding fan. I do hope I can be lucky enough to obtain the Feb. 1948 issue, and also the brand new *Fantastic Novels* reissue—however I will leave this to fate—and the "crossing of my first and second."

Canada has no known fantasy publication as far as I know, so we indeed have to depend on "your" fans—can we?

Yours hopefully and earnestly,

J. J. STAMP.

Norval,
Ontario, Canada.

FINLAY'S DEC. COVER

Enclosed is the sum of one dollar and eighty-eight cents for a year's subscription to F.F.M. beginning with the Feb. 1948 issue. Apparently no store, no stand, not even the P.X.s here in Manilia, stock F.F.M., at least that I can find. Just three weeks ago I was in the States, just late enough to get your December issue. The Finlay cover was magnificent, the best he's done since his return. On the other hand, his interior for "Atlantis' Exile" qualifies for the opposite record.

Suggestions: Use more of Bok's work. Print Chambers' "In Search of the Unknown", "The Slayer of Souls", (A fine weird novel, despite some now-dated political situations), and "The Maker of Moons".

FRANK D. MCSHERRY, JR.

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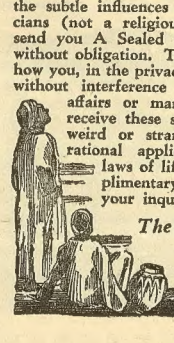

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DERLETH TOPS

With Christmas shopping complete, and a blizzard in the making outside, I find myself with some spare time. Hence comes an epistle to F.F.M.

Of course, the big news is *Fantastic Novels'* revival and, accordingly, the return of the marvelous Munsey reprints. You couldn't have chosen (and I mean this literally) a better story than "The Ship of Ishtar" for F.N.'s comeback. It has always been to me the finest tale of the finest author—A. Merritt; tantamount to labeling it the best fantasy ever written.

The February F.F.M. had a fairly good cover, but I can see that Finlay, as well as Lawrence on the interior, had difficulty in locating a fantastic scene to illustrate.

"The Peacemaker" was a fine character study, was generally well done, and contained about as much fantasy as the life of Justice Holmes.

Leinster's yarn I didn't care for. I suppose you bought it to shut the science-fictionists up, but I'll bet it won't. One of Leinster's poorest.

"The Lonesome Place" by Derleth, was simply and charmingly written, and is probably the best this time. It's a quietly chilling little piece that will no doubt be this year's top short, at the rate you've been going. Was anyone else reminded of Ray Bradbury's "The Night"? An extremely fine pic for this, incidentally.

Where is Bok and the poetry? Sho' was great to see Bok bok. *Masters of Fantasy* is excellent; like to see a sketch on Weinbaum if that's possible.

Gentle hint: I need all F.F.M.'s for 1941, and "The New Adam", book or mag. Can anybody do?

JOHN WALSH.

154 North Main St.,
St. Albans, Vt.

REQUEST

Recently I bought *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, and I particularly liked the letter column. In it I noticed comments on a story you had previously published, Vivian's "City of Wonder," which compared it favorably to Haggard's works. Another letter mentioned that you had published two of Haggard's works, one of which was "Allan and the Ice-Gods." Could you let me know the name of the other, and if I do not have that volume, would it be possible to purchase from you the magazine that had such story, and also the Vivian one?

I am particularly anxious to get copies of Haggard's works, so if anyone has any for sale, will he please write to me?

MRS. ERNEST FERNANDEZ.

c/o C. S. Eidman, Jr.
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Brownsville, Texas.

Editor's Note: The other Haggard story was "The Ancient Allan." We do not have any back issues.

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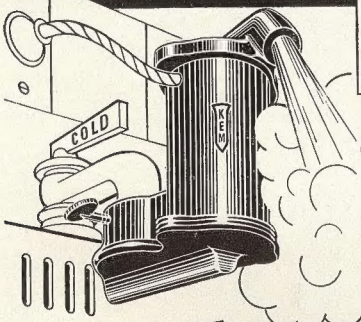

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